

Golf: Is it a good exercise?

With the warmer weather, everyone is getting out to walk – and walking is good for us. The parks and trails are certainly more inviting since the snow is long gone, and many of the flowers and shrubs are in full bloom. A walk can be relaxing and give you time to think in a world which is often too busy, with a lot of demands. It is always a challenge to balance, family, children (and grandchildren!) along with jobs and various other activities. But walking is an excellent exercise. A brisk walk of 30 minutes, at least three times a week, will benefit your heart, lungs, circulation in your legs and – it helps to maintain your bone density and prevent osteoporosis. CAUTION – always be sure to check with your health care professional before starting any new exercise or fitness program.

With the warm weather also comes golf – and golf and walking are like "two peas in a pod". Many take up golfing as a hobby or pastime but golfing is good for your overall health. Of course there is more to golfing than just walking. A few years ago, I took up golfing (and had lessons too) and learned how difficult it is to hit that little white dimpled ball down the fairway!

Many of my patients use golfing as their main form of exercise during our better weather. With golfing it is important to be ready for the season by starting with a program of walking in the early Spring. Start slowly and gradually increase your time and pace, especially if you have been inactive over the Winter months. Be sure to wear good walking shoes which provide proper support for your foot, ankle and arch. If you are having problems with your feet, ankles, knees or hips when walking, you should have your health care professional evaluate you for orthotics, which may be indicated, depending upon your examination findings. These are customized inserts for your shoes, which provide optimal support for your foot and ankle. This in turn makes your gait mechanics more efficient and reduced the strain on the joints of your lower back. Hopefully this will improve your golf game as well!

Once you have started walking, the next step is to work on increasing the flexibility of the muscles through your hips, legs, lower back and shoulders. If you have never stretched before – be cautious and take your time. If you do not have an exercise program, consult with your health care professional in order to obtain a program which is appropriate for you. It is important to remember that stretching should not hurt. Any stretch should be taken to the point that you feel tension in the muscle but not to the point where you are feeling or anticipating pain. On the other hand, if it is getting too easy to do basic stretching, you may need an upgraded program to maximize the benefit.

Before you tee off on the first hole, be sure to warm up your legs, hips, lower back and shoulders. Golfing is a very "ballistic" activity. In other words, hitting a golf ball, especially your initial drive, is a very fast movement. This can cause significant strain on the lower body as well as the shoulders.

Be sure that your golf shoes have adequate traction so that you do not slip on wet grass. If your "spikes" are worn, please replace them.

Be cautious not to "kill" the ball or over-rotate your torso (not many of us can hit the ball like Tiger Woods!).

It is not a bad idea, to have your golf pro review your swing on an annual basis to see if there are some aspects which can be worked on, which will not only reduce the risk of injury, but more importantly, reduce your score.

One other item which is often of interest to golfers, is how to carry their clubs. If you always use a motorized cart, that eliminates any strain of carrying the clubs, but it also reduced the benefit to your heart, lungs and circulation, for battling osteoporosis. If you are carrying your bag, the new double straps appear to be better than using a single strap which can cause an asymmetrical strain on your back and shoulders.

If you are using a golf cart, then it is best to push the cart rather than pull it. When you pull it behind you, you tend to torque or twist your body towards that side every time you take a step forward. Whereas, if the cart is in front of you, it is much easier to keep pushing it in a very smooth motion, in the right direction.

Chiropractors often see golfers through the first 2-3 months of the golfing season. Golfing can provide a very enjoyable activity both from a physical and mental well-being.

So as you can see, golf truly is an exercise with multiple benefits!