

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Chiropractic Care Boosts Golfers' Performance

Fall is here! And that means many golfers will be squeezing in a few more rounds before winter begins. Golf can be fantastic exercise and a powerful source of stress reduction. However, golf can also be hard on the spine, often triggering back disorders. That's why Dr. Gravesen teaches patients how to keep their spines up to par when hitting the links. And, exciting new research shows that regular chiropractic care may boost a golfer's performance.

Do Like the Pros

According to Dr. Tom La Fountain, a chiropractor who tours with the PGA, 70 to 75 percent of the athletes on the tour are under regular chiropractic care.

"Back pain is the most common physical complaint among professional and recreational golfers, albeit for different reasons," adds Dr. David E. Stude, a chiropractor who teamed with LPGA pro Lisa Masters to educate golfers about the benefits of chiropractic.

But you don't have to be a pro golfer to reap the rewards of chiropractic care. Dr. Gravesen finds that amateur golfers derive significant benefits from chiropractic as well — both in terms of injury prevention and in terms of optimizing athletic performance.

Chiropractic Boosts Golfers' Swing Performance

Exciting research indicates that chiropractic care may boost golfers' swing performance.

In one study, investigators followed 43 golfers at two golf clubs in São Paulo, Brazil. The participants were divided into two groups. Between the two groups "average age, handicap, and initial swing were comparable." (*J*

Chiro Med 2009;165-70.)

Both groups took part in a stretching program. In addition, one group also received chiropractic care once a week for four weeks.

At each session, "all golfers performed 3 full-swing maneuvers. Ball range was considered as the average distance for the 3 shots."

After four weeks, golfers who underwent both stretching and chiropractic care enjoyed significant improvement in full-swing performance. On the other hand, full-swing performance did not change significantly in the stretching-only group (*J Chiro Med* 2009;165-70).

Putting for Perfect Posture

Another way that chiropractic care enhances a golfer's performance is by focusing on posture. Dr. Gravesen teaches patients that proper posture — both on and off the course — is key to avoiding golf-related injuries and improving your game.

For instance, a level backswing is dependent on proper posture. A backswing is actually two motions in one: the up/down movement of the arms and the rotation of the body — both are directly dependent on spinal health.

That's why a healthy spine is so vital to a golfer's game. If the spine is out of alignment, the swing will be out of alignment. That's also why so many professional and amateur golfers alike schedule regular chiropractic check-ups.

By correcting a spinal condition called **vertebral subluxation**, chiropractors help perfect the postures — and golf games — of patients.

Vertebral subluxations occur when spinal movement is restricted or spinal bones (vertebrae) become misaligned. This common condition is linked with a myriad of health concerns, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches, backaches, infantile colic and ear infections. Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.



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Is Your Bag to Blame?

Although golfers tend to blame back-related problems on suboptimal swings, many golf-related injuries have nothing to do with the actual game, explains the doctor.

Golf bags, by themselves, have substantial bulk and weight. Add to that the maximum number of clubs allowed during course play — a mix of 14 irons and woods — along with a dozen or so balls and assorted accessories. The result? Enough weight to cause serious injury.

Prevent bag-related injuries by asking the doctor to outline proper lifting techniques. In addition, never carry your bag from hole to hole. Instead, invest in a portable, hand-pull cart.

Cancel the Cart

Here's a simple way to dramatically improve your fitness level: Choose to walk the course, rather than rent a cart. Walking elevates aerobic activity, increases stamina and boosts immunity: maximizing athletic performance and warding off injury. (Again, make sure that your bag-carrying technique is ergonomically sound.)

Back in Shape

Low-back injuries are particularly common among golfers.

Why does golf generate — and aggravate — low-back pain? According to researchers, the answer is two-fold: poor mechanics and today's more demanding swing. "Stiff hip and back muscles are often the root causes of flawed mechanics. Also, older golfers may have back conditions that the swing aggravates: The disks between the spinal vertebrae get less elastic with the years and, therefore, are less able to distribute the stresses that the swing puts on the back." (*Harvard Health Letter* 2000;25.)

Warm Up Before You Tee Off

Warming up is essential when it comes to staying in the game. However, despite overwhelming evidence supporting the need to warm up, most golfers remain cold to the idea.

"Few amateur players adequately warm up before practicing or playing a round of golf. If you don't stretch prior to golfing, you are asking your body to play golf with an added handicap. Muscles that are warm and stretched properly prior to teeing off are supple and loose, which enables your body to perform to its full potential." (*PGA Tour Golf Academy Student Instruction Manual*.)

In one three-week study — conducted at a private club, public course and golf driving range in Australia — researchers observed 1,040 amateur golfers (852 men and 188 women) over the age of 18. "Only 54.3 percent performed some form of warm up activity. Air swings on the tee were the most commonly observed warm up activity, with 88.7 percent of golfers who warmed up performing these." (*Br J Sports Med* 2001;35:125-7.)

Why is stretching so important? Because jolting stiff muscles into action triggers muscle strain and vertebral subluxation.

Additional benefits related to stretching and warming up are outlined in the Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour Golf Academy Student Instruction Manual:

- ✦ Greater swing flexibility and motion, allowing for a solid follow-through without straining any muscles.
- ✦ Improved muscle endurance.
- ✦ Fewer aches, pain — and lessened chance of injury.
- ✦ Increased enjoyment of the game.

There are countless stretching exercises from which to choose. The doctor can outline a routine for you that is particularly tailored to your needs. Start with a series of simple arm, neck and leg stretches. The key is to move slowly and deliberately, easing into each stretch and completing it fully.

Shorten That Swing

Research illustrates that shortening the backswing may reduce trunk muscle activation and possibly prevent back injury and pain — without affecting swing accuracy or club-head velocity. "However, the short swing increases shoulder muscle activation and may, in turn, promote risk for shoulder injury," note the study's authors (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2001;24:569).

Leave the Painkillers In the Sand Trap

Before reaching for a pill to ease post-golf soreness, consider this: Doctors of chiropractic don't believe pain should be masked with possibly hazardous medication. Instead, our office focuses on the source of the disorder, restoring alignment and motion to the spine with chiropractic adjustments. So, before hitting the links this season, schedule an appointment for a sports chiropractic checkup.



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