

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Gohar Sheikh

Chiropractic Care for Golfers

What do Tiger Woods, David Duval and more than 75 percent of golfers in the PGA have in common? They all sing the praises of chiropractic. But you don't have to be a professional golfer to benefit from chiropractic. Amateur golfers also reap the performance-boosting rewards of regular chiropractic care.

Throughout the world — from Scotland to South America — men, women and children of all ages and income levels are hitting the greens. Golf has long been heralded as one of the best ways to exercise the body and relax the mind. As in any sport, however, injuries can occur if you don't take the proper precautions. Golf can be especially hard on the spine, often triggering back disorders. That's why Dr. Sheikh teaches patients how to keep their spines up to par.

Focus on Posture

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 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. Sheikh corrects vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called chiropractic adjustments.

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.

Blame the Bag

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



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 your doctor of chiropractic to outline proper lifting techniques. In addition, never carry your bag from hole to hole. Instead, invest in a portable, hand-pull cart.

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.)



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Fortunately, chiropractic care can get golfers back in the swing of things.

In 1994, the U.S. Agency for Health Care Policy and Research and the Department of Health and Human Services endorsed chiropractic adjustments (spinal manipulation) for acute low-back pain (LBP) in adults. An independent, multidisciplinary panel of private-sector clinicians and other experts assembled the report after developing specific statements on appropriate health care for acute LBP.

For instance, one statement declared that spinal manipulation is the safest approach to LBP relief. Philip R. Lee, M.D., assistant secretary for health and director of the Public Health Service, said, “By encouraging people with acute low-back problems to resume normal activities, using only those treatments that have been scientifically shown to be effective, these guidelines could save Americans considerable anguish, time and money now spent on unneeded or unproven medical care.”

Warm Up

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* 2002:121.)

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. Your doctor of chiropractic 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

A recent study shows 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;24:569-75).

Stop for Soreness

Whoever said “no pain, no gain,” was far off course. If you experience pain during an activity, whether on or off the golf course, STOP!

Pain is your body’s way of letting you know that there is a problem. It’s like the “check engine” light on your car’s dashboard. Rather than “playing through” pain, call your doctor of chiropractic immediately to stave off more serious injury later on.

The Hazards of Painkillers

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, they focus on the source of the disorder, restoring alignment and motion to the spine with chiropractic adjustments.

A Chiropractic Checkup: Your Ticket to Golfing Success

Golf is a game. It is also exercise.

The No. 1 rule when embarking on a new exercise program is to call your doctor of chiropractic and schedule an appointment for a checkup. To go from a sedentary to active lifestyle takes time and patience. Even if you are already actively involved in another sport, your chiropractor may suggest some modifications to your golf game — until your body is fully up to par.



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