

Avoiding Golf's Pain in the Neck

Dr. William Erbe

A computerized motion analysis of more than 150 tour golfers conducted by Mike McTigue and Sportsense, Inc. determined that the average golfer's upper body turn is 88 degrees on the backswing and 110 degrees on the follow through. For the typical golfer, that is about 200 degrees of body/shoulder rotation around a fairly stationary head and neck. The middle thoracic part of your back is designed for rotation while the lower part of your neck is slightly less qualified for this movement. This causes a great deal of stress on the cervicothoracic junction (where your neck meets your upper back). Because of this problematic junction, a number of players have developed intervertebral disc problems. Some of them have been minor and others severe enough to require surgery.

"De-conditioning" is the inability of your joints and muscles to perform with strength, stability and full range of motion. As we mature, our tissues tighten and dehydrate due to our sedentary lifestyle. By sitting and standing, we actually train our muscles and joints to resist movement. You are already aware of this problem when symptoms include stiff necks, shoulders and up-

per back. These symptoms are a result of underlying muscles and joints that need to be strengthened, stretched and mobilized. Specifically, these conditions coupled with improper golf posture, lead to injury. In general, these conditions lead to osteoarthritis and disc degeneration.

Let's start with self analysis. (1) With your back two feet from a wall and without moving your feet, can you turn and place your palms on the wall behind you? (2) Without moving your feet, can you turn your head at least 70 degrees to the right and left? (3) With your arms out to the side and elbows bent 90 degrees with your hands up, can you rotate your forearm backward past your head? If you cannot do these actions, you need to begin to work on conditioning for general health and golf performance.

If you can do these with no trouble, then a strengthening that emphasizes stability is advisable. If you cannot, then a stretching and strengthening program is advisable. If these cause some pain, then a trip to a sports-oriented chiropractor for joint examination should be done first before engaging in strengthening or stretching.

Here are some general exercises for these problem areas:

A. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your arms straight out to the side. Turn your head to one side and let your bent knees rotate to the other side.

B. Lie on your back. Interlock your fingers above your head and stretch you arms above your head.

C. Lie on your stomach with your arms at your side. Raise your head and chest off the floor.

These exercises should be held for 6 to 10 seconds and repeated 3 times each.

Even though we are talking about golf performance and injury prevention, you should take these exercises to heart for general health benefits. Remember, general maintenance of your muscles and joints is a necessity, not a luxury. Before starting any program, see your sports-oriented doctor first. If you feel any pain while performing any exercise, stop and see your sports-oriented doctor immediately.

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