

A pain in the neck?

Former Course Manager and Master Greenkeeper John Ross now works to improve health and safety in the workplace. Here he looks at various medical conditions that can arise from greenkeeping and advises you how to avoid them

The golf course is a hazardous place to work. Low branches, steep slopes, chainsaw blades, flying golf balls, chemicals – all risks that greenkeepers are exposed to.

Generally speaking, golf clubs will manage that risk because it is visible and obvious through risk assessments, procedures being put in place, and staff training.

These risks are categorised as low likelihood – high outcome events because you can go years without any incidents, and high outcome because of the immediate need for medical attention and the potential for serious harm. It is the potential for harm that raises the alarm and focuses the mind when completing a risk assessment. We visualise the accident, imagine the scenario, and assess accordingly.

However experience tells me this is not where the greenkeeper is most at risk. There are hidden exposures too often taken for granted and often ignored in the risk assessment process. These

are high likelihood - low outcome exposures, high likelihood because exposure is almost certain and low outcome because the resulting injuries are not immediate nor obviously associated with the exposure. One category of this injury is Musco Skeletal Disorders (MSDs).

These injuries often happen over a long period of time and are caused by poor ergonomics, poor posture, repetitive tasks, the exertion of excessive force, working in restricted spaces, or badly planned manual handling. They can also be caused by normal daily activities such as playing sport. MSDs are generally upper limb and lower limb problems and/or back pain. If diagnosed they can be treated – but if not treated they can become chronic problems.

WRULDs (Work Related Upper Limb Disorders)

This is a group of conditions that affect the arms, wrists and hands, caused by forceful, frequent

about the author



John Ross MG

John Ross is a Master Greenkeeper and was a Course Manager for 20 years. After taking redundancy in 2010 he studied for a degree in Health and Safety and is now a member of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health. He established 'Compliant Grounds' in January 2013 with the intent of providing a qualified competent service to the golf industry - www.compliantgrounds.co.uk

Catch John's 'Accident Causation' seminar at BIGGA's South East Regional Conference on Tuesday 19 November!



WRLDs (Work Related Lower Limb Disorders)

Affecting the hips, legs and ankles these are less common. Symptoms are sore tendons, stiffness, weakness, cramp and swelling of the joints and tendons. Users of early hydraulic driven machinery will be familiar with the phrase triplex knee, this was in fact a WRLD caused by the constant excessive pressure exerted by the knee on a badly designed drive pedal.

twisting and repetitive movements. Common types of WRULDS are tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome and hand arm vibration syndrome.

Tendonitis is commonly known as tennis/golfers elbow (medial/lateral epicondylitis) and is caused by repetitive movements and excessive workloads without adequate rest periods.

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when tendons or ligaments in the wrist become enlarged, often as a result of repetitive use.

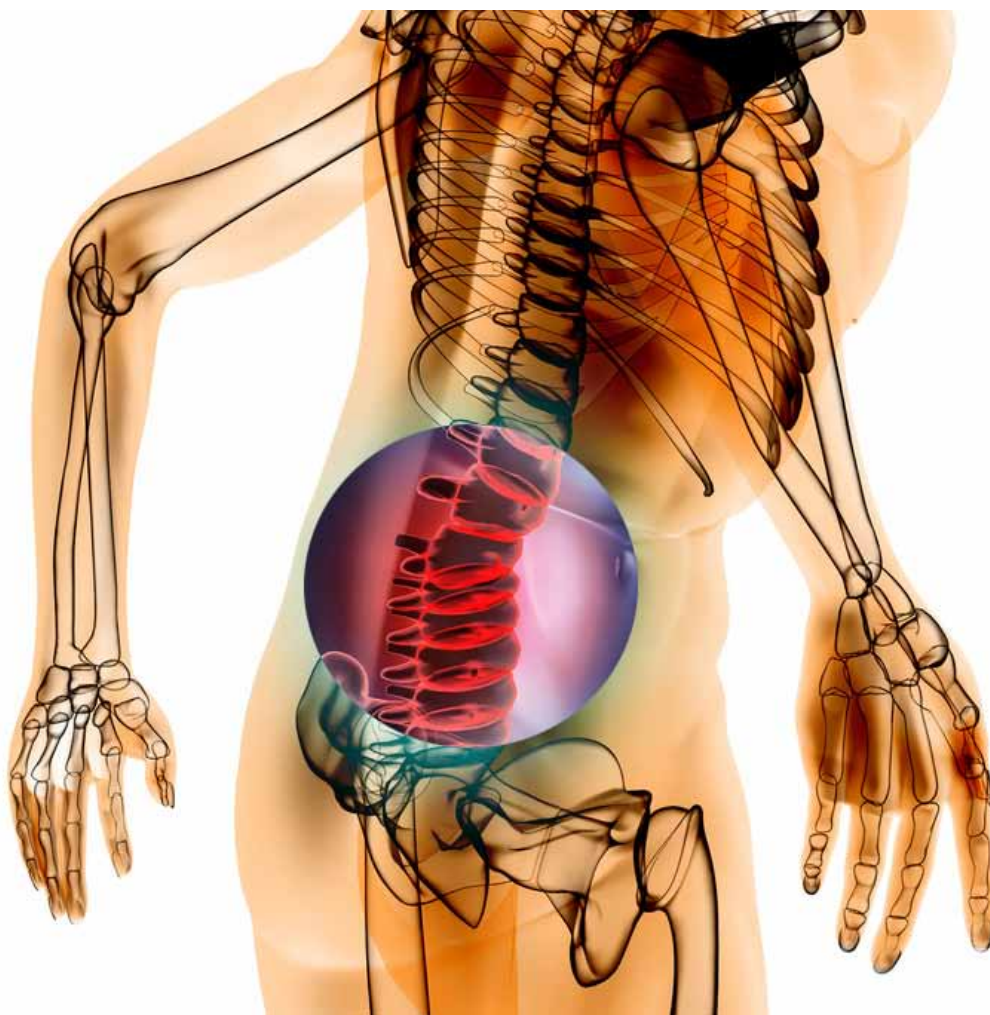
The excessive use of vibrating tools can cause hand arm vibration syndrome and aggravate carpal tunnel syndrome. Hand arm vibration syndrome affects the blood vessels, nerves muscles and joints of the hand.

This is a widespread condition that affects thousands of workers and ranges from a tingling of the fingers in its mildest form to extreme pain and reduced gripping capacity at its severest.

Back Pain

Back pain is a strain of the muscle or other soft tissue connected to the vertebrae. Sometimes it is the intervertebral disc that is strained causing it to bulge, this is called a slipped, prolapsed or herniated disc and the result is the damaged disc pressing on the spinal nerve. If it presses the sciatic nerve, the pain will be felt in the leg some distance from the back. This is called a referred pain.

Depending on which vertebrae are affected the pain can be felt down the back of the leg, or in some cases down the thighs. Eight out of ten adults will have some form of back pain during their life. In many cases there is not a specific underlying problem or condition that can be identified as the cause of the pain. However factors that can increase the risk of pain or further aggravate it include standing, sitting or bending down for long periods, lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling loads that are too heavy, or poor technique in these situations. Operating equipment that exposes operators



TIPS

Here are some quick tips on how to minimise the chances of being affected by the conditions mentioned above:

- Avoid manual handling and repetitive tasks
- Where it cannot be avoided reduce it by rotating tasks, reducing loads and using manual handling aids - (see HSE booklet indg398). If a task can be mechanised, it should be
- Remember manual handling is the moving of any load by bodily force including lifting, pulling, pushing or shoving
- Organise your deliveries and manage your storage to minimise distances travelled and loads carried (storing fertiliser bags at waist height, and liquids with handles at hand height avoids bending and stooping)
- Report concerns to a manager or supervisor
- Make suggestions to improve working conditions
- Use anything provided to prevent MSDs as instructed
- Take breaks from repetitive or forceful tasks
- Do not expose yourself to vibration beyond the exposure action level of 2.5 m/s^2 in an eight hour period
- Be aware of the early symptoms of hand arm vibration syndrome
- Do not use vibrating machinery in the cold, wet or whilst smoking (all reduce blood flow to the nerves)

to body vibration, trips or falls, poor posture or being overweight can also cause back pain.

Sprains and Strains

A sprain is when a ligament is stretched beyond its capacity, these are most common in the arm or wrist and generally happen as the result of an accident or poorly planned tasks. Fatigue is a factor in strains – not tiredness but the sudden use of a muscle that has been idle for a while. A strain is a stressing of a muscle that can result in muscular tear.

Abdominal Hernia

A common injury resulting from lifting or digging, it occurs as a result of a weakness in the abdominal wall which develops into a localised hole through which abdominal organs may protrude. The likelihood of a hernia is increased by a bad diet or smoking.

Employers and employees duties

It is clearly set out in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 that

both the employer and employee have duties in relation to managing health and safety. The employer has a duty to ensure - so far as is reasonably practicable - the health, safety and welfare of his employee. The employee has a duty to take reasonable care of themselves and others, and not to intentionally or recklessly interfere with anything provided in the interests of health and safety.

There are other duties relating to the management of risks, and these are set out in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. They also apply to both the employer and the employee.

The approved code of practice in Regulation 3 states that significant risks and hazards should be addressed, and that all activities including routine and non-routine should be reviewed. Regulation 6 Health Surveillance places a duty on the employer to offer employers health surveillance as appropriate with regards to risks to their health and safety. What this means is the employers are bound by law to identify any risk associated with work, and if identified, to keep records of any occurrences if they arise.

All these conditions can be caused or aggravated by work, or by normal daily activities or hobbies. If a task or piece of equipment is badly designed, it should be highlighted in the risk assessment, and managers should be aware that risk assessments are evidence that would be used in the eventuality of a claim.

Footnote

My personal experience has prompted me to write this piece. I spent five years in pain as a result of both medial and lateral epicondylitis, have suffered sciatica and had a slipped disc. When I was a Course Manager I lost my Deputy for 18 weeks due to two abdominal hernia operations and countless days for back pain.

I know too many greenkeepers with similar injuries and as much as we love golf and golf courses, later in life the price paid can be debilitating. It is well documented that agriculture is regarded as a dangerous profession and the similarities between the farm and golf course are too close for comfort.

To my knowledge there has never been a survey on the cost to the golf industry of days lost through these conditions - however I am sure that if one were conducted, the results would mean minds would become concentrated.