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Golfing to stay injury free

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If you are a golfer, you are probably eager to start the season off at Kuwait's new golf course. If you have already played a few rounds, hopefully you've stayed injury free. But take note: unless you take an active approach to prevent injuries, you stand a good chance of having at least one golf related injury this season. Also, if you have been trying to convince your spouse or friends that golf is good for your cardiac health then read on--I have some facts to help bolster your argument. The reality is that golf is far from a gentle game on the body, injuries are common, and playing golf has been shown to promote positive cardiovascular effects for the body.

At any given time, roughly one in four golfers is playing with an injury that arose from the game itself. If golf is a gentle, non-contact (other than hitting the ball) sport, then why are there so many injuries? The answer lies primarily in the swing itself. Occasionally a golfer will slip and sprain an ankle or put his back out picking up his bag, but the most common injuries come from swinging the club. The golf swing, even when done correctly is far from natural for the body. Joints are forced to the end of range and often in patterns that overstress ligaments, muscles and structures like the discs in your back. These stresses are present even on people with a full range of motion in their joints. Apply these stresses to a stiff, de-conditioned body and the results can easily spell injury. So how can you prevent yourself from being injured?

Below I have listed six areas that you can address to decrease your chances of injury:

1. Always maintain an off-season strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular program. Maintaining conditioning throughout the off-season provides you with a strong foundation to start when the golf course opens. You can also build up strength in key golf muscles, helping you hit the ball that extra 15-20 yards.
2. Break yourself in slowly at the beginning of the season. Your body isn't ready to hit two large buckets of balls your first time out. Start with hitting a small bucket and build up from there. Also be aware of trying to practice your driver too much too early. It's the longest club in your bag and usually encourages the hardest swing. Not what you need to do after a few months off.

3. Perform a warm up and stretch before practicing or playing. Ideally, you would like to increase the temperature of your muscles before stretching. This could be a brisk walk around the parking lot or running on the spot for five minutes. After that spend five to ten minutes stretching your spine and extremity muscles.
4. Take lessons to improve technique. It has been shown that professional golfers actually put less stress on their body during a single swing than amateurs because they have better technique. A qualified golf professional can help you develop better technique.
5. Use good equipment. Depending on your age and strength, certain types of clubs may be easier on your body. For instance, graphite shafts produce less vibration, which helps dampen the forces that cause some of the overuse injuries of the upper extremities. Equipment also refers to good shoes, gloves, and protection from the sun.
6. Don't neglect aches and pains in the early stage. All too often we think that injuries will go away by themselves. Sometimes aches and pains are normal and do go away but if icing the sore area and a few days of rest doesn't get rid of your pain, you should consider seeing your health care professional. It's also a good idea to be seen by someone who understands the game of golf and is up to date on the current research regarding golf injury treatment and prevention.

As I mentioned at the beginning golf can be healthy for the heart. Recently, a study in Europe divided 110 healthy but sedentary men, aged 44-65 into two groups. One continued their normal routines, gardening and household chores and the other played two to three rounds of golf per week (walking between holes, of course). All of the men went through a series of tests before and after 20 weeks. The golfers showed a significant loss of weight and reduction in abdominal girth, and also increases in aerobic capacity, strength, and HDL ("good") cholesterol levels compared to the non-golfing group.

So have a great golf season and try to incorporate some of my advice into your golf routine. If you do, I'm sure you will have a healthier season and may find it helps your game as well.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com

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