

Spare your Back this golf season

Are you a golfer who has, or have had low back pain and just chalked it up as a normal consequence of being an avid golfer? Well, I'm here to tell you that it's not normal, and there are reasons and solutions for your pain. A golfer with sound technique, proper core stability, muscular balance, and good awareness of how to perform basic activities of daily living rarely will succumb to the effects of low back pain. So let's discuss what causes low back pain in the golfer and what to do to combat this golfing epidemic.

The main combination of low back pain in a golfer is poor swing technique, weak core stability, and muscular imbalances. Let me begin by describing swing faults that cause increased loads to the low back and lead to pain. First, the golf swing begins at set-up, and this is where we see our first swing fault- *the "S" posture*. Many golfers have mistakenly been told to stick their butt out, and they proceed to do this by arching their back excessively. This posture causes the abdominals and glutes to become inactive throughout the swing. These muscles are core stabilizers and power producers in the golf swing. The S-posture golfer also places increased stress on the low back at the top of their back swing. The second part of the swing is the backswing, and many golfers try to falsely increase their backswing by tilting their trunk towards the target at the top. This *Reverse spine angle* causes over activation of the lumbar erector spinae muscles and places excessive compressive loads on the vertebra. This right-handed golfer often complains of left sided low back pain. Next comes the downswing, and many golfers *early extend*, which is excessive lower body movement towards the ball instead towards the target. Besides loss of power, this also causes increased lumbar spine arching and abdominal inhibition. Finally, the golf swing ends with the follow-through. The once accepted, but now frowned upon finish is the *reverse "C" position*. For the right-handed golfer, this position places considerable compressive forces on the lower right side of the lumbar spine. To determine if you are golfing your way into low back pain, I suggest consulting your local golf pro to assess your swing mechanics.

The second aspect of low back pain in the golfer is the lack of optimal core stability and the presence of muscular imbalances. Not only does your core produce the power in your swing, it also provides the much needed protection for your spine during the swing. I liken your core to a can of tennis balls. Your core is the container that supports the tennis balls (your spine). If you remove the container (core), the tennis balls become unstable, but with the container they are a stable unit. Your spine should be protected like the tennis balls, from all sides; in the front by your abdominal muscles, the back by your low back erectors and your sides by your abdominal obliques and quadratus lumborum. The main cause of weakness in your core is a sedentary lifestyle which produces muscular imbalances of your core. This muscular imbalance leads to decreased function of your core muscles and doesn't protect your spine from everyday stresses. To determine if you lacking the proper core stability or muscular balance necessary to play pain free golf, contact your local golf fitness doctor who can perform a series of functional tests specific to this issue.

So, instead of allowing your low back pain to continue, I suggest consulting a golf pro, golf doctor and golf specific fitness trainer to treat your pain, and build both your core stability and golf swing.

Dr. Kevin Christie, D.C. CSCS
Titleist Certified Golf Medical Practitioner.