



Common golf injuries

Repetition causes overuse injuries

Around the world, golf is enjoyed by millions of people, young and old. A challenging, fun and sometimes frustrating game, golf demands tremendous skill and concentration. To play well, players must also be strong and flexible.

Golf isn't considered a risky sport, but injuries can occur. Most golf injuries are overuse injuries, such as strains, sprains and fatigue. Repeatedly swinging a club can lead to pain in the lower back, wrist, elbow and shoulder. Also, because golf is played outdoors and can take several hours to complete, golfers must guard against sun-related skin problems and dehydration.



Player Safety

Common accidents, serious injuries

Golfer's elbow An inflammation of the tendons that attach the forearm muscles to the inside of the bone at the elbow, golfer's elbow is marked by pain on the inside of the elbow. This is an overuse injury, the result of repeatedly swinging a golf club.

Low back pain Poor swing technique can put pressure on the spine and back muscles and may cause low back pain.



Bone injuries By swinging a golf club, kids who are still growing may injure their open "growth plates"—the developing tissue near the end of the long bones. Elbow discomfort is common.

Shoulder pain Golfers need equal strength in both shoulders to withstand the stress of swinging a club from the backswing through the follow-through. The tendons and muscles that stabilize the shoulder, called the rotator cuff, are susceptible to tears.

Sunburn

A round of golf can keep you in the hot sun for four or five hours. Sunburns, sun poisoning and serious skin problems affect many golfers who don't take precautions.



How can you prevent golf injuries?

The hazards of the game go beyond sand traps and high rough. Here are some tips for preventing injuries and staying safe on the golf course:

- **Use the right equipment:**
 - Gloves can make clubs easier to grip and offer protection from blisters.
 - Don't play with clubs that are too long or short for your height. Playing with the wrong size clubs can lead to poor technique, which can cause strains, soreness and muscle pulls.
 - Wear golf shoes with spikes to avoid slipping when you swing. Real golf shoes provide better traction and stability than regular sneakers.
 - Also, make sure the shoes fit well and are flexible, and let the shoes dry off completely between rounds.
- **Repeating the wrong technique puts extra strain on the back, wrists, elbows and shoulders.** To learn the right technique, take lessons from an experienced coach or trainer. Look for a pro certified by the PGA (Professional Golfers' Association of America).
- **Even if you're just hitting some practice balls, stretch first.** Focus on the back, legs, elbows and wrists. Also, work up to a full swing. Try hitting shots with wedges and short irons before moving up to irons and drivers that require a full swing.
- The hot sun beating down all day can lead to sunburn and serious skin damage. **Bring sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat and protective clothing.** Also, make sure you have plenty of water to keep you hydrated.
- Always be aware of your surroundings. Flying golf balls can come from any direction and can cause injuries. **If someone yells "fore," cover your face or seek protection behind a cart or tree—a hard, fast-moving golf ball could be headed your way!**
- **Also, stay clear of other golfers when they are hitting their shots.** Young, inexperienced golfers must learn to stand back to avoid being hit by a club during a backswing.
- **Watch out for lightning.** If the lightning alarm goes off when you're on the course or if thunder and heavy rain signal that lightning may be on the way, head inside—fast!

Keeping Kids on the Course

Golf is a game you never really master.

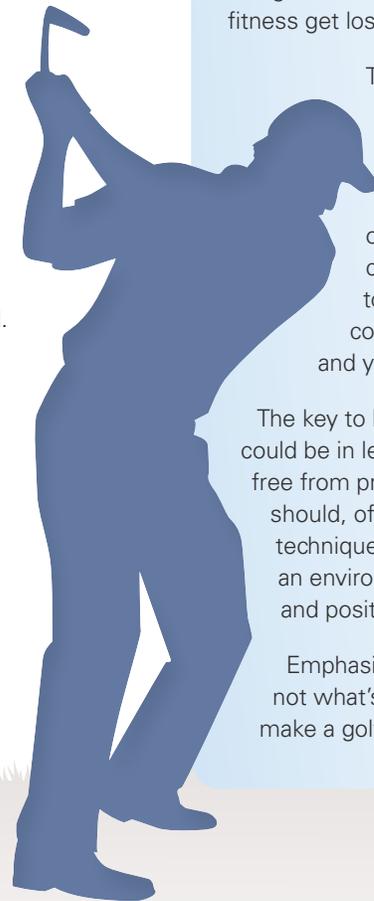
Missed putts and drives into the woods can be hard on the most seasoned players, but they are particularly tough on kids. In fact, a report by the National Golf Foundation found that, between 2005 and 2008, the number of golfers age 6 to 17 dropped 24 percent, to 2.9 million from 3.8 million. The study cited the intimidating design of many modern courses as the main reason most kids put down their clubs.

In many sports, not just golf, mastering new skills and trying to be perfect can lead to frustration and burnout. About 70 percent of young athletes give up on youth sports by age 13. With pressure from parents, coaches and others, sports stop being fun, and the benefits of physical fitness get lost.

That's a shame, because golf is a game that can be played by children, adolescents, adults and seniors. Instilling a love of the game at a young age could create a commitment to fitness and health that could reap rewards for years and years to come.

The key to keeping kids on the course could be in letting kids play the game free from pressure. Coaches and parents should, of course, teach proper technique, but they should do it in an environment that's encouraging and positive.

Emphasize what's fun about golf—not what's frustrating—and you may make a golfer for life.



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This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed.



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