

## **Golf Season is in Full Swing**

Golf season is starting up again which means preparing our bodies for the season following those long winter months. Golfing is a complex activity that involves generating movements through both your upper and lower extremities, thus producing a great amount of stresses on the joints, muscles and ligaments. A bucket of balls on the range, numerous practice strokes, and an average of 90 strokes during a round (or much more in my case), and you can see how this adds up. You need a significant amount of strength, flexibility, and coordination in the muscles to prevent injury.

There are some acute type injuries seen on the golf course - golf clubs thrown in anger hitting either the owner or an innocent bystander, or an errant backswing hitting a partner. The most common injuries seen though, are those from overuse. Repetitive injuries, as the name implies, are caused by performing the same movement over and over again. Over time, these repetitive forces can accumulate leading to muscle strains. This damage may initially be perceived as a mild ache or tightness in the muscle, but may develop into a more significant and chronic problem.

Low back pain is the most common complaint among golfers, and is usually the result of the rotation motion in the golf swing. Although this is the most common cause, golfers that carry their own bag have twice the incidence of injuries compared to those who don't. Studies have shown that a stretching program for the low back and hips can decrease the incidence of low back pain.

There are specific muscles in the shoulder that are active in the swing and these are also commonly injured. These include the pectorals (the chest muscle), the subscapularis (a rotator cuff muscle), and the latissimus (a muscle in the back). When these muscles are overused they can develop tendonitis syndromes; an inflammation of the muscle tendon. Arthritis and bursitis are also common problems seen in golfers' shoulders.

"Golfer's elbow" or medial epicondylitis is also a common complaint, and is pain or soreness on the inside of the elbow. "Tennis elbow" or lateral epicondylitis, although the name is misleading, is as well a very common golf injury, and is pain on the outside of the elbow. Both have been shown to be prevented by stretching and strengthening of the forearm muscles, but can also be due to swinging techniques.

So before you get back into your golf game this season it is wise to initiate a golf fitness program. A well-designed program will include stretching, core muscle strengthening, balance exercises, and an aerobic component. Seek help from your local health care professional for help designing a program that suites you best. It is also wise to seek instruction from your golf pro, who can improve your technique, thus decreasing your chance of injury.