

Script – Print - Get Ready to Golf

Exercise to Avoid Injury This Season

While the cold temperatures and snow is a nagging reminder that winter still lingers, the good news is that golf season is just around the corner. And that has many golf enthusiasts itching for time outdoors, chasing the little white ball around area courses.

Before dusting off your clubs, however, the first matter of business is getting your body right for the long season. Hopefully, you've maintained some level of fitness during the winter months. But if you haven't, experts have some solid advice in order to keep your body injury free, especially to start the season.

"It's just like getting right out of bed," said Erik Smith, athletic trainer, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "You're really going to be stiff, your muscles are going to be really taut, and we need to shake those up. And it's like you said, if you're going to grip it and rip it, there are going to be injuries and some soreness in your body and you're not going to play as well as you'd hope to be."

For the most part, golf is a relatively safe sport, but injuries can happen, especially as a result of not using proper form and technique. Most golf-related injuries involve the lower back, shoulders, wrists, and elbows. Walking nine or 18 holes can be challenging, especially if you've been mostly sedentary for the past several months. Even carrying a golf bag can cause back and shoulder pain. That's why it's important to start making changes immediately. Flexibility is the key. It will promote mobility, which helps joints throughout the entire body.

"You can start pretty slow right now," said Erik Smith, athletic trainer, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "Start with some cardio whether you're going to be walking or even riding, you're still going to be doing a whole lot of cardio work in the game of golf. If you have a gym membership and you've been slacking on it I would start going. You can do 30-40 minutes a day for 3-4 days a week, and you can amp that up as you'd like. But overall strength and mobility and flexibility in the body is super important in the game of golf."

Once you're ready to hit the course, make sure to arrive early to warm up. Give yourself at least 10-15 minutes to properly stretch your back, hamstrings, abdominals, arms and shoulders to stay flexible. And get to the range to hit some balls to loosen up those muscles. And remember to swing properly. The keys of a good swing include good posture, a stable lower back, and a slow relaxed swing. Most injuries that happen on the courses are a result of poor form and an incorrect swing. An early-season injury, especially during cooler temperatures, can really set back a golfer for a period of time.

"It can be as little as a few days up to a month or so depending on that individual's body and how bad they injured it, whether they've had previous injuries of the lower back, or if that lower back injuries cause other problems down the road to other body parts," said Erik Smith, athletic trainer, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center.

OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center offers a Golf Advancement Program (GAP). The program is led by licensed athletic trainers and physical therapists who work with clients to reach their full potential as golfers through physical exam, golf swing analysis, exercise instruction and ongoing therapy. The goal of the program is to reduce risk of injury, decrease aches and pains and add years to your game. For more information, visit www.osfsaintanthony.org