

Script – Ease into the golf season

Every year, more than 500 million golf rounds are played on courses across the country. And while anxious golfers are racing to local courses for a quick round, that first swing of the season can come with a risk if your body isn't ready.

"I think about the low back, especially the population that plays golf tends to be a little bit older sometimes," says Michael Hahndorf, a physical therapist with OSF HealthCare. The lower back, the shoulders. You think about the arms and wrists are important, but you don't want to forget about your foundation as well – your legs, your ankles, your knees, your hips, all that is important too. It goes back to just stretching and being more prepared for what's coming when you do play."

Hahndorf recommends starting a stretching routine. Before starting any round, give yourself at least 10-15 minutes to properly stretch your back, hamstrings, abdominals, arms and shoulders to stay flexible. And make sure to get plenty of practice swings in before you head over to the first tee. Start with the smaller irons and work your way up to the driver and not just on the first hole with the first swing.

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.

Start walking to warm up

"Start to walk nice and easy. Get your body used to kind of physical activity again, taking some swings at home without even going to the driving range," Hahndorf says. "It could be something as simple as going to the driving range and hitting a small bucket versus large, and then kind of working your way into nine holes for a little bit, and then slowly transitioning to those 18 holes. Because it's going to be a big change of pace from nine to 18 over the course of time."

For the most part, golf is a relatively safe sport, but injuries can happen, especially because of not using proper form or technique. The keys of a good swing include good posture, a stable lower back, and a slow relaxed swing. An early-season injury, especially during cooler temperatures, can really set back a golfer for a few days to weeks.

"When it comes to a good golf swing, you think about having good posture and having a flat back," Hahndorf says. "Have your hips tucked underneath you, have your knees bent a little and those arms straight down. Posture plays a role importantly there, because it's going to allow for that rotation."

And remember to spend some time stretching again following when the round is over. "It's important to stretch before to warm up but also afterwards, so you can kind of get ahead of some of that soreness. Because it can be tough for the first couple rounds," says Hahndorf. "Just maintain just a gentle stretching routine for five to 10 minutes a day to keep that low back, hip, shoulder mobility kind of where it was when you ended."

A little soreness is expected early in the golf season. But any pain that lingers or gets worse might call for physical therapy. Touch base with your medical provider with any nagging concerns.

"Just take care of your body. If something hurts, pay attention," Hahndorf says. "You know how things are supposed to feel. So, if it feels off make sure you're reaching out if you need to."

For more information on physical therapy, visit the OSF HealthCare [website](#).