MILESTONES: A NEW YEAR CALLS FOR A NEW APPROACH

GOLFTIPS

THE GAME'S IN-DEPTH INSTRUCTION
& EQUIPMENT MAGAZINE

www.golftipsmag.com

SOAR ABOVE PAR

REACH NEW HEIGHTS ON THE GREENS THIS SEASON

- PLAYING SHOTS OFF UNEVEN LIES
- POWER GOLF
- POCKET-TO-POCKET PITCH SHOTS
- HIT LONGER AND STRAIGHTER DRIVES
- CIRCLE DRILL TO MASTER SWING PLANE

& MORE!

PLUS Improve Your Game With Mevo+

FEBRUARY 2023

COMING BACK

Making a successful return to golf following a back injury

By Dr. Angelica Napolitano, PT, DPT
Optimal Physical Therapy and Wellness, LLC

Let's be honest: Golf is an addictive sport; it's fun, competitive and arguably the best pastime of them all! It's a sport that challenges the player by requiring the body to move through a sequence of skilled movement patterns in a controlled and powerful manner. Locomotive concepts are difficult to grasp and poorly executed by the majority of those who engage in frequent playtime. However, these biomechanical deficits are significantly detrimental to one's physical health and rarely addressed because they are typically a silent threat bearing no tell-tale signs for a number of months or even years. This is why golf has a much higher rate of injury than most players are aware of and is the leading cause of lower back injuries—which are also the most notorious of them all.

Sound familiar? If it does, then you may want to continue reading on. The answer to increasing longevity on the greens and staying out of pain is simple. Just as you are dedicated to showing up for tee times, you must also show up for prevention, but sometimes it's too late—or is it? Let's discuss options for a safe return to play after a back injury has taken you away.

Let us first understand that the vast majority of golf-related injuries result from overuse and a lack of consideration to prehab and load management. In other words, while common injuries in most other sports are a result of unforeseen traumatic events that inflict immediate pain (i.e., fall, collision, impact, etc.), the most common golf-related injuries are the result of something we don't even know is happening through the development of compensatory movement strategies that cultivate and worsen over time but are largely preventable.

If you're concerned that you might be at risk of injury, unsure if you're underestimating your workload, or are unconfident in your swing mechanics, it's important to either consult with a medical professional or have a conversation with your PT or golf instructor.

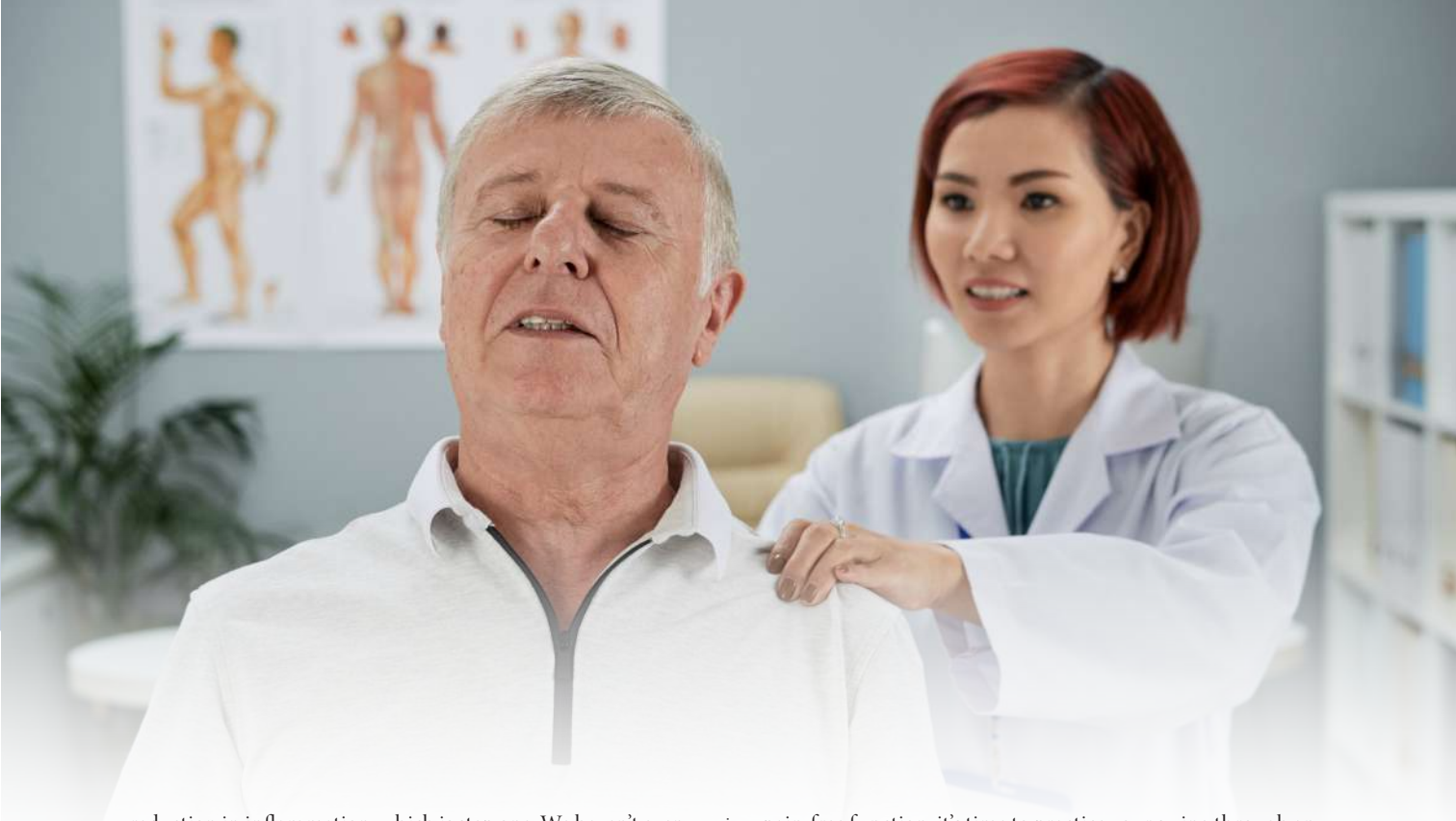
If you've already sustained an injury, particularly concerning the back, you may be curious as to when you can expect to return to the green. While the answer to this question will vary depending on the type, severity and mechanism of injury, it's important NOT to return earlier than you should, no matter how tempting it might be.

Unfortunately, returning early is the most common mistake of any golfer, or athlete in general, for that matter! In fact, a premature return to action is a surefire way to ensure a reinjury or regression of the progress you may have already made. Every relapse of symptoms becomes a bigger hurdle that requires more time and effort in your goal toward achieving pain-free play.

How To Return To Golf Post-Injury

My most frustrating patients are the ones who don't listen to the advice I'm about to give you here. They come in for relief of lower back pain, which is usually obtained within the first two to three sessions and equates to around one to two weeks of no play. This is great, but even after I have given a thorough education and warning on what I'm about to tell you, this somehow still remains the biggest mistake made by golfers with the most severe consequences. One to two weeks is not and will not ever be a sufficient amount of time to begin playing again once an injury or pain have been sustained, regardless of whether pain is present or not. Do not do this! A dysfunction, limitation or some sort of problem is still present and will linger during this time—we've barely scratched the surface on the work that is to come.

Let me further educate you on the facts surrounding this. Our bodies do not possess the ability to make a full recovery after only one to two weeks; it's just not possible. In fact, this is a vital stage of protection, and the real work has yet even to begin. The pain that has diminished is likely the result of a



reduction in inflammation, which is step one. We haven't even addressed the physical limitation that brought you here in the first place. That's the real issue at hand, not the pain.

A successful return to the green, especially from a vulnerable back injury, requires a multifaceted, multidisciplinary and multistaged approach that, in all phases, requires movement correction to some degree. Too much rest is never good and can, in fact, make the situation worse.

Phasing your return through a progressive rehabilitation protocol should be executed through very isolated steps during the early stages of recovery. We're essentially making corrections one by one that will allow us to piece together the finished product. We begin by fixing things like muscle imbalances, motor control insufficiencies, instabilities, weaknesses and other restrictions so that we can then train and load the correct pattern of movement to re-educate our mechanics the proper way. But we are not done just yet. After you've restored pain-free function, it's time to practice your swing through another gradually phased protocol that must be strictly followed as well. A good swing coach can help you in creating this plan alongside your PT.

Approach Recovery With Patience

The important thing to remember, if nothing else, is that while it may be tempting to return early after an injury if for no other reason but for the love of the game, it's imperative to take the necessary precautions recommended by your PT in order to have any longevity in the sport.

Back injuries, in particular, require patience and an understanding of their seriousness. Once you're committed, anything is possible, and you will prevail—good luck!

For inquiries on whether or not you may be at risk for injury or think you may need a plan to help you safely return to sport, please email golftipsmag@gmail.com for more. **GT**

ASK THE DOC

With Dr. Angelica Napolitano, PT, DPT, aka the "Golf Doc"

In our "Ask the Doc" column, I answer real questions from real people regarding their golf game and the physical limitations that may impact their ability to perform. I am a board-certified doctor of physical therapy and golf rehab and performance specialist. Each month, I will choose questions at random to answer.

To enter your question for future editions, please email golftipsmag@gmail.com and keep a lookout each month to see if your question was featured.