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SEPT./OCT. 2021

What Does Your POSTURE Say About You?

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

Has anyone ever told you to stop slouching or to stand up straight? As annoying as that is, your posture is an outward reflection of internal emotions that is shared with the world and up to interpretation. Posture is defined by the position in which we hold our bodies both statically and dynamically. It is a language that reveals a mental and emotional story connecting our feelings of self-worth to our environment.

You may think that your words and facial expressions are the banes of your emotional existence; rather, it is the physical being that subconsciously manifests itself from thoughts and feelings. Posture is ultimately a silent expression that creates our emotional identity from an external point of view.

The next time a negative thought, feeling or emotion begins to creep in, pay attention to the way your body physically behaves or reacts to these emotions. Realize that our complex nature as human beings can be closely compared to that of an onion. We are made up of so many layers that must be cautiously and strategically peeled back, starting with the outermost layer. This superficial layer of wellness ironically symbolizes our physical state of being, therefore we must start here when connecting the dots and moving through each layer in chronological order. For if we neglect certain layers, skip over others, or move too quickly, our foundational wellness will crumble from underneath us.

This may seem like a challenge for many because of the societal disconnect that fails to provide the necessary guidance on how to identify which professional service or resource is appropriate to help solve the problem you've successfully diagnosed. Fortunately, this process is quite simple, as it begins with the physical layer where you can use your posture as a baseline for measuring outcomes.

Addressing your posture will also give insight into the mental and emotional layers of wellness. This can sometimes offer a way to overcome obstacles created by false realities and perceptions of personal development and self-esteem. Remember that it is important to separate the comprehensive layers of our existence into individual components as we begin our onion-peeling process. These layers consist of the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and spiritual states of well-being, in that order. Recognizing when to ask for help will only support your journey and the desired outcome you wish to achieve. For more information on how to begin, email golftipsmag@gmail.com. **GT**

ASK THE DOC

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

Welcome to our "Ask the Doc" column, where 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.

Q: *I'm seeking advice for the recent development of pain in my lead knee, which is my left knee since I am a right-handed golfer. I'm 68 years old and currently retired after 40+ years as a computer engineer, so a lot of my time is now spent playing golf. I've been very active my whole life training and ran marathons for many years but had to stop in my 50s because of pain in my left hip diagnosed as bursitis. My doctor said if I continued running, it would come back with a vengeance, so that's when I really started to pick up golf. I've been able to manage my bursitis from returning by stretching and doing exercises to strengthen my core, which seem to be working. With my hip feeling better, I have started going to the driving range a lot more to practice my swing to become more consistent. However, I started noticing a sharp pain on the outside of my knee about a month ago that would come and go only when I was hitting balls or playing a round. Now it's hurting all the time, even when I'm not playing. I'm not exactly sure what I'm doing wrong, and I haven't gone to the doctor because I am afraid he's going to tell me I have to stop golfing, too. Is this a common problem for golfers, and is there anything I can do myself without having to stop or go see a doctor?*

—Elliott W., Hollywood, Florida

A: Knee injuries, specifically in the lead leg, have been reported to range between 10 to 20% of all golf-related injuries, so while they're not rare, they're also not as common as something like the lower back or shoulder. Before giving you recommendations on how to correct the problem, let's first identify it. A few things that jump out at me from the brief history you have provided that may link your pain to the source, so let's discuss them a bit further. I'd be willing to bet that the old hip injury plays a role in the onset of this new knee pain as it relates to mobility. During the golf swing, the knee should remain a stable joint while the hip requires a large degree of mobility. Before we continue, you must understand that mobility isn't the same thing as flexibility; however, they do intersect. When we talk about gaining mobility, it means we want to increase the amount at which a joint can actively move through its appropriate range of motion. Flexibility is the temporary and passive elongation of a muscle that is responsible for only 1/3 of a joint's total mobility while the other 2/3 come from strength and balance, so mobility = flexibility + strength + balance.

It is possible that this diagnosis of bursitis likely caused the muscles in the hip to atrophy and/or weaken over time. This loss of strength will typically go undetected and can cause alignment issues to happen at the hip, knee and even the ankle, which will gradually create dysfunction within your movement patterns. Looking back, you probably had poor alignment to begin with, and that's how the bursitis developed initially, but going off the facts you've given me here, it is easy to see how each physical component affects the next like a chain of events.

Weakness has challenged your hip's potential for generating the necessary mobility that it requires to meet the demands of the golf swing. So in order to complete the swing, your body will resort to borrowing motion from the neighboring joints above and/or below the hip. This is bad for the knee because it was not designed to tolerate lateral- or rotational-based movements like the hip and should predominantly move in one plane of motion, allowing for bending and extending. If the knee is repetitively placed under stress in these planes of motion, it can cause damage to the surrounding soft tissue, such as a tendon or ligament, and it can also cause degenerative changes to occur at the level of the bone and cartilage. Please note that these changes can happen independently or in combination. Another factor to consider would be the use of improper footwear, which can influence the mechanics of your foot and ankle, thus directly affecting the knee as golf is a sport that works to transfer energy from the ground up.

Formulating a diagnosis that directs your plan of care is best done in person, where an in-depth physical examination and movement assessment can be conducted. In your case, it imperative that you seek help from a medical professional who is competent in the evaluation and treatment of musculoskeletal impairments and conditions as they relate to golf-specific movement. A good physical therapist will rarely advise you to permanently stop participating in recreational hobbies or sport-related activities, as we base our plan of care and goals around a safe return to sport. I always recommend finding a PT that is TPI-certified or one who specializes in golf rehab and performance for the most effective treatment outcomes. To do this, you can go online to the TPI website and search its directory to find the right fit for your return to play. Good luck!

If you're interested in learning more or would like to have your questions answered in the next edition, please email me at golftipsmag@gmail.com and stay tuned for future publications. **GT**

DISCLAIMER: *The advice and recommendations given here are intended to be purely educational and not to serve as or replace any medical advice given by your doctor or any other medical professional. Please consider the risks before trying any of the recommended suggestions.* Golf Tips Magazine *and the author of this column are not to be held responsible or liable should anyone attempt to recreate this advice with resultant harm and/or physical consequence or repercussion. We advise that you consult your doctor for proper medical clearance before making any attempts, and please do so at your own risk.*