

Golf And Your Feet



Leading the Way

First, your weight is placed lightly on the balls of your feet, balanced between your front and rear foot. Then there is a slight shift to the back foot, then another shift back to the front. Sound like dance steps? These intricate movements actually describe what goes on below the knees during an ordinary golf swing.

Good foot action is the mark of an accomplished golfer. "All timing, distance, and direction comes out of the lower body with the feet leading the way," golf legend Jack Nicklaus has said. Nicklaus or any professional will tell you that problems with the feet, even a painful corn or callus, can impede timing and balance to the point where it's reflected on the scorecard at the end of the day.

Close to 45 million Americans enjoy golf on an amateur level. Above and beyond the satisfaction of competition, a full round of golf affords the opportunity for a 4-5 mile workout that can reduce stress and improve cardiovascular health.

Be Prepared

Before taking to the links, your body needs to be prepared for the workout involved in walking the whole course. (If the pros can walk, so can you!) Anyone older than 40, or having any problems with weight, respiration, blood pressure, pulse rate, or cholesterol, should check with a doctor before playing. The same goes for smokers, diabetics, and people with preexisting injuries or a history of heart trouble.

Your podiatric physician, a foot and ankle specialist, knows the importance of wearing proper golf shoes. Once, driven by fashion, golf shoes were wing-tip oxfords with spikes. Today, shoes are constructed using basic principles of athletic footwear. Some even incorporate advanced technological innovations such as graphite shank reinforcements, which keep them light and add strength.

Don't wear anything on your feet that wouldn't be comfortable if you were taking a good long walk. Make sure shoes fit well in the store before purchasing them. It's best to shop for them in the afternoon when the feet are slightly swollen. Try on shoes with the same socks you'll wear on the course. Tie both left and right shoes tightly and walk around your store or pro shop a few minutes before deciding on a make and model.

Some simple stretching exercises are important before taking to the first tee and after leaving the last. Consult a podiatric physician who specializes in sports medicine for a light stretching regimen that will help alleviate stiffness after a day of golf.

The Ideal Swing

Biomechanics, the application of mechanical laws to living structures such as the feet, play a crucial part in developing the ideal golf swing. The lateral motion and the pivoting intrinsic to the golf swing can be functionally impeded by certain biomechanical conditions. Faulty biomechanics can inhibit proper foot function, and your game will suffer.

The anatomy of a biomechanically sound swing goes like this: During set-up, your weight should be evenly distributed on both feet with slightly more weight on the forefoot as you lean over, and slightly more weight on the insides of both feet.

Maintenance of proper foot alignment on the backswing is critical for control of the downswing and contact position. During the backswing, weight should be shifted to the back foot. It should be evenly distributed on the back foot or maintained slightly on the inside. Shifting weight to the outside leaves you susceptible to the dreaded "sway," a common error in swing. Without an exact reversal of the sway in the downswing, swaying will result in improper contact with the ball.

As the back foot remains in a solid position on the back swing without any rolling to the outside, the front foot is in turn rolling to the inside. The front heel occasionally comes off the ground to promote a full shoulder turn. Completion of the backswing places the weight on the back foot, evenly distributed between forefoot and rearfoot, with the weight left on the front foot rolling to the inside.

The downswing involves a rapid shift of weight from back to front foot; momentum brings the heel of the front foot down, and follow-through naturally causes a rolling of the back foot to the inside and the front foot to the outside. Golf should always be played from the insides of the feet.

Like the great Nicklaus said, "lively feet" are critical to a successful golf game. Having healthy, biomechanically stable feet is the first prerequisite for achieving that goal.

Orthoses: Preventing Pain, Improving Game

For the foot that is not able to function normally due to biomechanical conditions such as excessive pronation (rolling in) or supination (rolling out), a state of optimal biomechanics can be achieved through the use of orthoses, custom shoe inserts that can be prescribed by a podiatrist. Orthoses not only allow the feet to function as they ought to but can alleviate the predisposition to injury brought on by biomechanical imbalances.

If you already wear orthoses in your street shoes, by all means transfer them to your golf shoes. Podiatrists who specialize in sports medicine say there are cases when orthotic devices optimally designed for golf shoes will be different than those designed for street shoes.

If biomechanical problems are present in your swing, they will invariably cause symptoms when walking the links as well. Addressing biomechanical problems in walking may therefore result in the secondary benefit of an improved swing through proper foot function.

If a round of golf is painful on the feet, first assess the quality of your shoes. Any time pain is not adequately resolved with good, stable golf shoes and is present for more than two or three consecutive rounds, it's time to visit a podiatric sports physician. He or she can diagnose and treat any problems and help make your feet an asset, not a liability, to your golf game.

Other Injuries and Treatment

The torque of a golf swing can strain muscles in the legs, abdomen, and back. The fact that the game is usually played on hilly terrain increases these forces, which in turn predispose to injury. Proper warm-up and stretching exercises specific to golf can help in injury prevention. A sports podiatrist can recommend a suitable warm-up regimen.

If biomechanical imbalances are present, these existing stresses will overload certain structures, and predispose the golfer to overuse of muscles and strain on ligaments and tendons. Orthoses will equalize the weight load on the lower extremity and in essence rest the overused muscle.

Other problems, such as tendinitis, capsulitis, and ligament sprains and pulls, can also keep a golf enthusiast back at the clubhouse. Improper shoes can bring on blisters, neuromas (inflamed nerve endings), and other pains in the feet. Podiatrists see these problems daily and can treat them conservatively to allow for a quick return to the sport.

When injured, participation is no substitute for rehabilitation. Injured body parts must be thoroughly treated and rehabilitated to meet the full demands of golf or any other sport. If you are injured, your return should be gradual. As much as you may want to get back to your game, take it slowly. A healthy body makes for a more enjoyable game and possibly a better scorecard at the

end of the day.

Tips from the APMA

- Start easy and build up your playing time carefully
- Don't forget to stretch regularly
- Fit your shoes with the socks that you plan to wear.

The American Podiatric Medical Association operates a toll-free telephone service, **1-800-FOOTCARE (1-800-366-8227)**, from which consumers can obtain informative literature on a variety of foot health topics. The [American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine](#), an affiliate of APMA, may be reached at 1-800-438-3355.

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