

SPORTS MEDICINE

Dr. William J. Bryan

Preventing wrist injury can keep you in the game

During this year's U.S. Open, Phil Mickelson wore a glove on his left hand that looked more suited for picking up a bowling ball than a golf club. He injured his wrist hitting too many balls out of the rough. The constant pain hindered his game and caused him to miss the cut, thus ending his chance to get back to his old championship form.

Mickelson is not alone.

Wrist injuries are quite common among golfers. In fact, a study of more than 200 golfers showed that nearly 35 percent reported some type of hand or wrist injury. The most common wrist injury is tendinitis, or swelling of the tendons responsible for wrist movement. Most will experience pain in the wrist as well as swelling and a creaking or grinding sensation when the wrist is flexed.

Treatments for golf-related tendinitis range from applying ice to wearing a brace. The best medicine, however, is rest. In more severe cases, steroid injections can ease the pain.

There are a few things you can do to help prevent golf wrist injuries. Always stretch before, during and after your round of golf. Strengthening exercises are also good. It's probably best to check with a sports medicine expert to develop your own wrist exercise regimen because doing the wrong exercise can do more harm than good.

Another good idea is to slow down your backswing. This will give you less whip of the wrist. Also, a vertical backswing increases the chances that the club will come down and hit the ground, so flatten your backswing. This will reduce the number of



divots you take. In fact, if your buddies will let you, try improving your lie. If they won't let you use a tee, I've heard of golfers putting the ball on a Life Saver. Use whatever works.

The alignment of your hands can contribute to wrist pain. Whether you use the overlapping, interlocking or ten-fingered grip, it's imperative that both hands be in parallel alignment. This means the palms need to face each other along the club. This alignment makes a natural wrist motion possible and can help prevent injury. Switching from a steel shaft to a graphite shaft also will help decrease weight and stress on the wrist during the backswing. Thicker grips on the clubs will help ease the pain from both tendinitis and arthritis.

I have talked about the importance of having strong core muscles (stomach, hips, etc.) in previous columns and it's no different here. If you have a weak core, you are going to tend to throw the club at the ball to get more velocity and distance. This will put a lot more strain on your wrist. Develop a strong core and let the body swing the club, not the club swing the body, and you will find the distance you want.

Most wrist injuries occur in the lead hand (left for right-handed golfers; right for left-handed golfers) and are due to overuse and/or poor swing mechanics. If you constantly hit out of the rough, sand or try to hit buried balls, or if you hit numerous balls off practice tees, you are increasing your chances of developing a wrist injury.

If you experience wrist pain, take a couple of weeks off from practicing or playing. If you have poor swing mechanics, get with a pro and take some lessons.

Paying attention to these two things might help you avoid a painful wrist injury. **HL**

ABOUT DR. BILL BRYAN

Dr. Bill Bryan's expertise in orthopedic surgery ranges from arthroscopic shoulder surgery to applications of emerging surgical solutions for middle-age knee problems. He has served as a consultant to industries investigating advances in partial and total knee replacements and is also a PGA consulting physician.

Dr. Bryan served as the Houston Astros medical director from 1983 to 2003. During this time, he was president of Major League Baseball's Physician Association and gave numerous presentations concerning the surgical and non-surgical care of adult throwing injuries. He has worked with many local baseball figures to build a national, quality player evaluation, injury treatment and condition center. Dr. Bryan is a members of some of the most prestigious

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Dr. Bryan is also a physician consultant for Physiotherapy Associates, the Official Healthcare Provider for the PGA, LPGA and the Champions Tour.

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