

The first in a new series aimed at curing and preventing back trouble

Getting the back right

By **Antoni Jakubowski**

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In the game of golf, back and joint pain is an epidemic. Professionals and amateurs all have it and if they don't now, they soon will. What can we do to recognise it? And how can we correctly manage the condition? With my experience specialising in the treatment of tour players and amateurs alike over the past 12 years, I'll try to help.

Golf is a repetitive strain sport. Whether we hit buckets of balls at the range, play three rounds per week or once a month, our body will absorb the abnormal physical stresses. It is important to understand the series of events that predispose us to injury.

Ligaments attach all of our bones together. Tendons attach muscle to bone and muscles are responsible for movement, support and stability. The brain controls the body, and the spinal cord is an extension of the brain. In between each vertebrae the nerves exit to send messages to the peripheral joints (hands, arms, legs, etc.) which allow us to swing the club and hit the shot. However, due to a number of variables (poor fitness, lack of flexibility, old injuries, overweight and possibly playing too much golf) we are at risk of over-stretching the ligaments and the supportive musculature, therefore making us a prime candidate for injury.

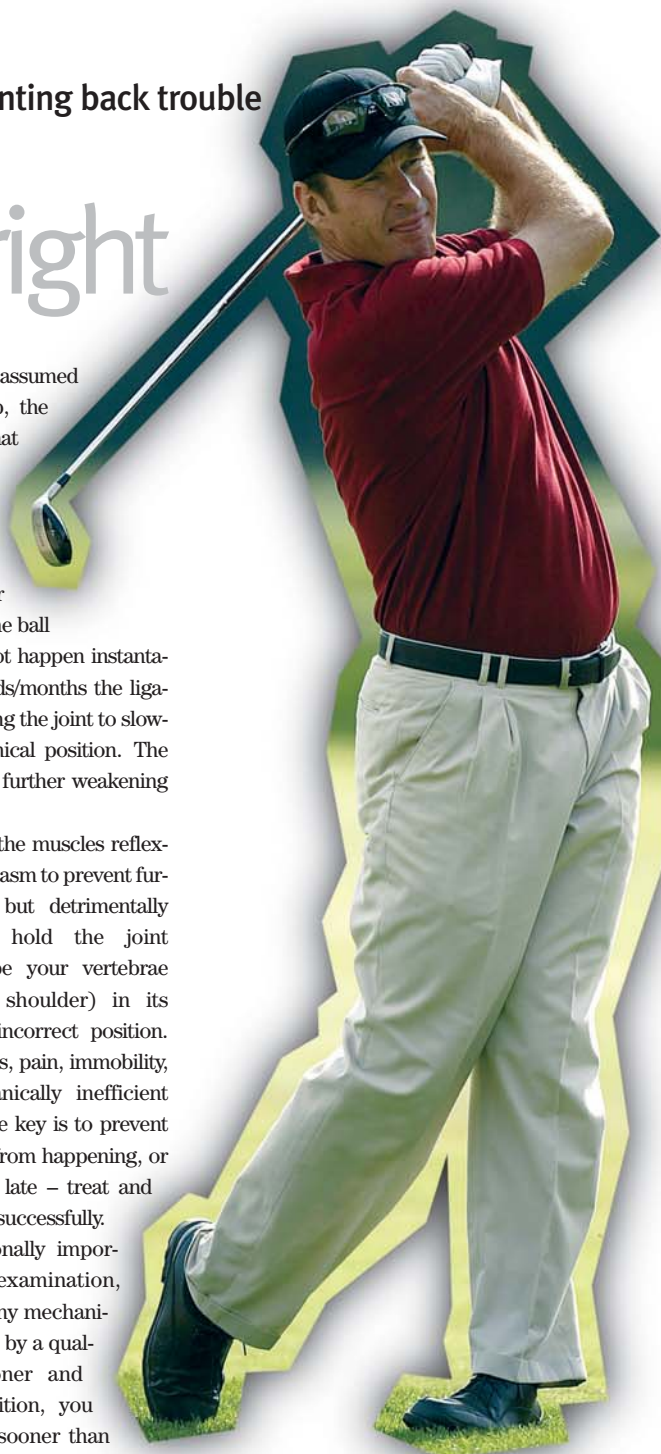
"Thanks to Dr J, understanding the necessity of spinal health has enabled me to maximise my performance."

Nick Faldo

As a result of the posture assumed while swinging the golf club, the back is the main structure that absorbs the force. We have all done it. Speeding to the golf club, you make it just in time for a couple of practice swings with your driver and then you proceed to hit the ball as hard as possible. It may not happen instantaneously, but over a few rounds/months the ligaments will over-stretch, causing the joint to slowly creep into a poor mechanical position. The muscles will also strain, thus further weakening the joint(s) in question.

As a result, the muscles reflexively go into spasm to prevent further damage but detrimentally continue to hold the joint (whether it be your vertebrae /hip/knee or shoulder) in its mechanically incorrect position. Result: stiffness, pain, immobility, and a mechanically inefficient golf swing. The key is to prevent these injuries from happening, or – if that's too late – treat and manage them successfully.

The diagnosis is exceptionally important. With a thorough examination, including X-rays to identify any mechanical disrelationship, treatment by a qualified experienced practitioner and management of your condition, you will be back on the course sooner than you think...and playing better golf. ●



HELPFUL HINTS

- 1 Stretch for five minutes before you tee off. It is very important to warm-up before you tee off, not only to prevent injury but also to play better.
- 2 Hit 20-50 balls on the range or in a net to warm up. This will also stretch the muscles, tendons and ligaments to prepare you for the round.
- 3 Drink water during the round. Dehydration occurs on the course and it will make you tired and you will lose concentration, reducing performance and possibly predisposing you to injury.
4. If you experience pain, ice the area for 20 minutes (try frozen peas) 2-3 times in a 24-hour period. If the area is still painful, call your doctor.
5. If you are a chronic sufferer, seek specialist advice.
6. If you think you may be unfit, contact your doctor before you start an exercise programme. The exercise programme should consist of stretching, cardiovascular exercises such as cycling, core stability exercises and possibly strength/toning exercises.

If you have any questions on the article, you can contact Dr Jakubowski at jakski@ukgateway.net or at 22, Harley Street, London W1G 9PL - tel: (020) 7637 2920.