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# Improving Your Golf Swing

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There's a perception that golf requires little athleticism. Try telling that to the next person who swings and misses the ball.

Although common athletic movements, such as jumping and running, aren't essential to play golf, an efficient use of body mechanics is necessary to keep the body injury-free.

### Sound swing mechanics

Develop a controlled swinging motion is the key to preventing injury, says

Scott McLean, an assistant professor of athletic training and movement science at the University of Michigan's Department of Kinesiology.

He notes that golfers who swing hard in order to produce long hits risk weakening muscles critical to performing their swing. While you might think that swinging with all your might would increase a shot's distance, rhythm and coordination are much more valuable than power in this sport.

"Muscles don't just help produce force — they help stabilize against too much muscle burden," McLean says. "If you swing too aggressively early, the muscles can't keep joints stable."

The inertia and momentum of a fast swing makes it tougher to slow down the body's movement after contact with the ball, according to McLean. That leaves golfers more susceptible than usual to injuries, such as muscle pulls and tears. He states that golfers need to train their muscles so they have the strength to slow down their swing after impact.

### Strengthen your core

The hips and lower back are two areas on which to focus training, says Masaya Sakihana, a performance specialist at Athletes' Performance in Phoenix, Arizona. Your average golfer doesn't have enough mobility and stability in those areas to properly prevent injury.

One way to correct that is by performing [planks](#), a stability exercise used often by those attempting to shape their abdominals. Your abs aren't the only beneficiary of this exercise. "The core isn't just abs," Sakihana says. "It's muscles in the shoulder blades, the trunk, hips. Planks are good for these areas."

He also advises doing [side planks](#), which activate obliques, the outside abdominal muscles that run along the body. This exercise is integral to muscle stabilization and will help produce powerful, controlled movements. Power can also be derived from strong hips, Sakihana says.

He recommends the following mobility workout that can give golfers the kind of hip power they need for their swing: Get the kind of exercise band that stretches to fit around both knees. Get into a quarter- or half-squat position and walk side-to-side, in a straight line and backwards. The exercise band will keep knees

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an optimal distance from each other so that they don't touch.

"The hips are almost like a steering wheel for the knees," Sakihana says, after noting that knee movement is controlled by hip muscles. "There's less pain in the knees if hips work well." Healthy hips also prevent mid- and lower-back stress.

People with poor hip mobility end up using their lower back to derive more power during their backswing. That puts stress on the lower and the mid-back, which likely aren't very mobile or stable if a person already has weak hips.

### Improve your posture

Michael Lamanna, director of instruction at The Phoenician Golf Academy in Scottsdale, Arizona, calls posture the most important issue for a fundamentally sound golf swing. It's also the most common problem he sees among players.

"If you have a slouch, an S-shape in your spine, then it's going to affect your ability to maintain your posture from start to finish when you're turning and swinging a golf club," Lamanna says.

The head should move as little as possible during the swing; any significant movement can throw off the body's posture, according to Lamanna. The rest of the body should turn in an alternating pattern during the swing — first the lower body, then the upper body, but never simultaneously.

"If you turn [your upper and lower body] at the same time, you're coming over the top of the ball every time and you will slice it," Lamanna says. In other words, parts of the body need to be stable while others must be mobile during a swing.

A golfer's swing will change with weight loss, so McLean notes that it's vital to play golf without overdoing it on the course or at the driving range. "You have to let your body become more coordinated [to its changes] in a reasonable time frame," McLean says.

Unlike baseball's pitch count, which is used to prevent overuse injuries to pitchers' throwing elbows and shoulders, there isn't a universal swing count to prevent injuries to golfers.

Pay attention to how your body reacts to various levels of golf activity. And ignore the urge to swing as hard as you can in hopes of driving the ball like a PGA pro. The ball won't travel as far as you want. Worse than seeing the ball travel a shorter-than-ideal distance after a bone-crushing swing is the way your back will feel the next day.

### Expert Adjustments

Here are more technical recommendations from Lamanna:

Try practicing your swing without a club. "Technique training is sometimes best accomplished without that inner sensation to create power," Lamanna says.

Work on your grip. Lamanna points out that controlling the club face is vital to producing accurate shots. It starts with how you hold a club. According to [Lamanna's website](#), the club should run across your lead hand — right hand for left-handers, left for right-handers — from the base of the pinky finger to just above the first joint of the index finger. The thumb should be placed on the back side of the shaft.

Place the pinky finger of your dominant hand over the top of your lead hand's middle finger and wrap the rest of your dominant hand around the club, bringing the thumb over the top of the thumb on your lead hand.

Control the path of your swing. Lamanna notes that rotation is the driving force used for swinging a golf club. "Golfers who set up with the correct grip, posture and alignment simply swing the club back and through with body rotation to hit the ball down the desired target line, Lamanna says. "If you don't turn correctly back and through, then the club face never squares up the target."

