

Bad Swing?

A Real "Pain" In The Neck

By David M. Ostrow, P.T.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? This is a common dilemma that has no good answer. The chicken-and-egg question for golfers is this — when you get hurt playing golf, is your body the problem or is it your swing? The answer is easy. Your golf swing hurts your body. The swing is a complex motion on a tilted plane with boundless torque, shearing and swing faults that induce a number of injuries.

According to Greg Rose, co-founder of the Titleist Performance Institute, the reverse spine angle is the leading injury-inducing swing fault. But is the swing fault causing the injury or is there something beneath the swing fault that's the real cause of the injury?

Most instructors tell golfers not to reverse the spine at the top and provide drills to correct the poor spine posture. However, the physical makeup of the golfer is what drives the swing fault most of the time, and many instructors don't understand this concept.

The instructors are not bad teachers. On the contrary, most seem to be magicians. They take a player with all of his physical imbalances and swing flaws, and somehow manage to help him get the ball airborne in the general direction of the target. They are really good at helping the golfer "fix" swing faults. However, golf instructors are not trained in human anatomy, and there is no way they could know that the body is responsible for most swing faults and most golf injuries.

Photos by Rob Tipton, courtesy Ryan Cattledge and Arthur Hills Golf Club, Palmetto Dunes Resort, Hilton Head, S.C.

Bad golf swings,
regardless of the reason,
cause injuries. Fixing the
body fixes the golf swing
and prevents injuries.



ARE YOUR SHOULDERS LEVEL?

xr
log
fat



THE SHOULDER/PELVIC HEIGHT TEST

looks at the squareness of your body. You are watching for one side of the body being higher than the other. Stand in front of a mirror. Look at your shoulders. Are they the same height? If not, put the web space between your thumbs and index fingers in the love-handle areas of your torso and push your hands toward the middle and down. Are your hands aligned in the same horizontal plane?

The human body is basically flawed. Even the “perfect specimens” on the tours are flawed in some way. The tour players, like the rest of us, have frame asymmetries, muscle imbalances, flexibility or strength issues, balance challenges and so forth. This is why the best players in the world still suffer with some inconsistency in their play.

If you want to play good golf and stay healthy, you must learn to control the quality of your game. It takes a little bit of work and a small team of professionals to help you.

Your golf instructor is your team leader. The instructor should be able to screen your body as a part of your lessons. Your teaching professional is also like your primary-care physician. You go to him for initial diagnosis of your swing. Your golf professional may prescribe treatment in the form of drills and practice. If your teacher is trained to fit clubs, the evaluation may show that the clubs are why your golf swing is “sick,” which means you may need to buy new clubs.

If your teacher is also trained to understand the influence of your body on

your swing, he may perform a basic physical assessment to determine if your golf swing is “sick” and why you are injured. He may also send you to someone who is trained to deal with the anatomy of the human body in order to find a solution.

The idea here is that a quick 5- to 10-minute body assessment can help identify the risk factors that lead to swing faults and injuries.

There are a few key areas you can evaluate yourself. You need to look at some simple motions like touching your toes, squatting, trunk stability and range of motion in your hips, spine and shoul-

TOE TOUCH TEST

This exercise is not only a test of hamstring flexibility but also your ability to hinge your hips and use your lower trunk muscles to stabilize the pelvis and spine to create a weight shift toward your heels. Put your heels and toes together, keep your knees straight and slowly bend down to touch your toes. If you can get to the bottom of your toes, you pass.

ders. You should also determine how well you coordinate motion between the top and bottom of your torso.

Here are some tests to tell if your body is the source of your swing faults and injuries.

SHOULDER/PELVIC HEIGHT TEST

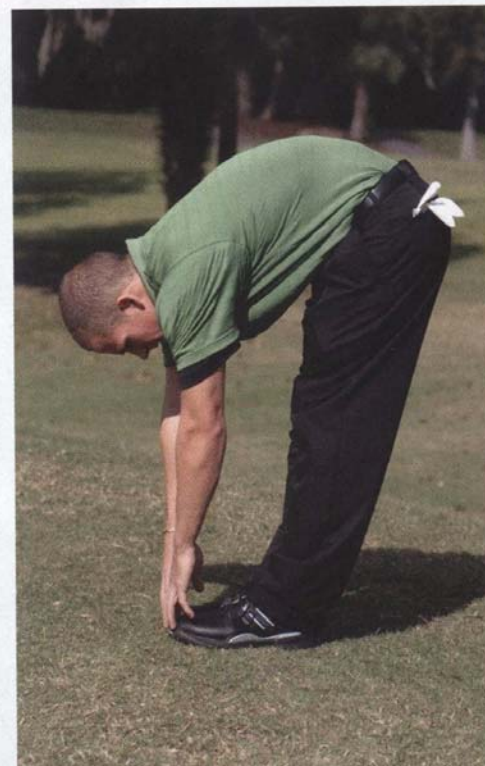
This test looks at the squareness of your body and to determine if one side of the body is higher than the other. Stand in front of a mirror and look at your shoulders. Are they the same height? If so, you’re square. If they are uneven, it’s probably because you have one hip higher than the other and will need to proceed to the following steps.

Put the web space between your thumbs and index fingers in the love-handle areas of your torso and push your hands toward the middle and down. Are your hands aligned in the same horizontal plane? If not, this is a predictor for lower back pain and will probably lead to a reverse spine angle, sway, limited torso rotation to the high side, inconsistent ball flight and eventually pain in the lower back on the high side.

TOE TOUCH TEST

This exercise not only is a test of your hamstring flexibility, but also of your ability to hinge your hips and use your lower trunk muscles to stabilize the pelvis and spine to create a weight shift toward your heels. If you can’t touch your toes, you can be certain that your spine posture will not be consistent at the top or at impact.

Put your heels and toes together, keep





**ROLL
YOUR
HEEL**

OUTWARD...

AND INWARD

THE HIP ROTATION TEST will check the mobility of your hip joints. To perform the test, sit on the edge of a chair. Put your right leg out straight with the heel on the ground. Next, roll your heel out to the side. Does your foot get to a 45- to 50-degree toe-out angle? Now roll the heel inward and see if the foot gets to the same angle. Don't flex or extend your ankle, but instead roll your leg as if it were a log.

your knees straight and slowly bend down to touch your toes. If you can get to the bottom of your toes, you pass. If not, your spine posture will not be stable during your swing. This will cause excessive shearing and torquing in your lower back, neck and shoulders and could lead to an injury.

HIP ROTATION TEST

Place your hands on your hips. If you put your hands in the same place as you did during the shoulder/pelvic height test, you're not on your hips but rather on the top of your pelvis.

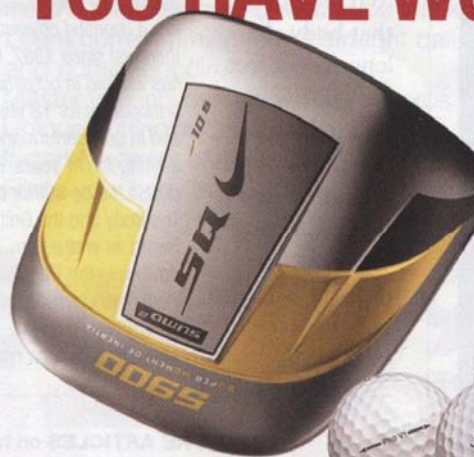
The hip rotation test will check the mobility of your hip joints. This is not the hip turn in the swing, but an anatomical test of hip range

of motion, a component of the hip turn. When hip motion is limited, your pelvis will sway or elevate on the limited side. This adds compression and torque on the lower back and can influence injuries in the lower back and in the shoulders, arms and hands. When the hips don't work well, most golfers overuse the arms and are prone to shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand injuries.

To perform the test, sit on the edge of a chair. Put your right leg out straight with the heel on the ground. Next, roll your heel out to the side. Does your foot get to a 45- to 50-degree toe-out angle? Now roll the heel inward and see if the foot gets to the same angle. Don't flex or extend your ankle, but instead roll your leg as if it were a log.

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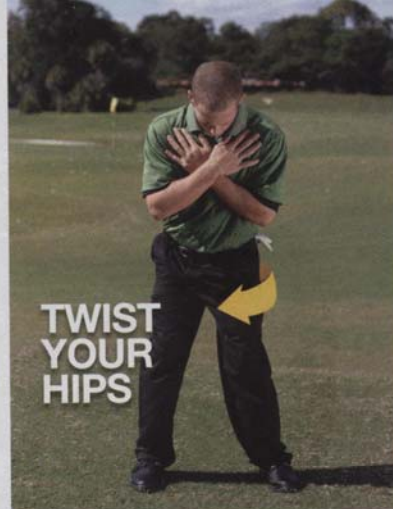
PELVIC ROTATION TEST

This fun test is a modification of the twist. Get in a golf posture with your arms crossed over the chest. Twist your pelvis and hips without moving your chest. If you can't do this or if your pelvic motion is more sideways instead of rotational, you'll struggle separating your pelvis from your chest on the downswing. You might also have challenges on the backswing.

This is a test of mobility, stability and muscle coordination. A failing grade here may lead to poor movement patterns

and swing faults like lateral slides that compress the lower back on the trail side or cause flipping and chicken-winging, which is a known cause of elbow, wrist and hand injuries.

If you do these tests correctly, you'll understand why you swing the way you do, why it has been hard to make swing changes and why you hurt when you play. There is no curve on these tests. If you go easy, you're probably fooling yourself into believing that your problems are not body related. That will not make you a better golfer or stop you from becoming injured.



TWIST YOUR HIPS

THE PELVIC ROTATION TEST is a test of mobility, stability and muscle coordination. Get in a golf posture with your arms crossed over the chest. Now twist your pelvis and hips without moving your chest. If you cannot do this or if your pelvic motion is more sideways instead of rotational, you will struggle separating your pelvis from your chest on the downswing.

You can do these tests with your golf instructor or on your own. If you need assistance, contact your local golf-fitness expert. There are many groups that do similar tests.

The most important thing to remember is that body challenges do affect the golf swing. Bad golf swings, regardless of the reason, cause injuries. Fixing the body fixes the golf swing and prevents injuries. ❧

David Ostrow is the president and CEO of Body Balance for Performance Inc. A licensed physical therapist since 1987, he has worked in outpatient orthopedics for 18 years and in golf-performance training for 11 years. He is also the co-author of The Body and the Golf Swing as well as an advisor to the Titleist Performance Institute. He can be reached via e-mail at dostrow@fitgolf.com.



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