

Evaluating Your Physical Ability To Play Golf

Presented by Body Balance for Performance

Today there are more people starting to play golf than any other sport.

Oddly enough, there are also more people quitting the game faster than any other sport.

One common reason golfers give for quitting the game is they find golf to be too difficult to play well. Many golfers also sustain injuries that force them to leave the game.

David Ostrow, a physical therapist specializing in the treatment of golf injuries and performance enhancement, said he found the least evaluated and most ignored element for most golfers is the area of golf-specific physical training.

“Very few golfers have had anything evaluated about their physical condition before starting to play golf,” Ostrow said. “And even if they are doing some type of physical training, in the majority of cases, they have not been professionally evaluated to determine whether the fitness regimen they are doing is specific to the game of golf.”

Consequently, a golfer who is not currently performing a golf-specific physical training program and has not made certain his existing program has been customized to his individual physical needs is basically playing while physically handicapped, according to Ostrow.

“His talents and abilities as a golfer are being interfered with by his *physical inability* to do what he needs to do in order to perform the golf swing properly, consistently and safely. The result is that far too many golfers develop injuries to their low backs, necks, shoulders or elbows,” Ostrow said

“To give you some immediate insight into your own physical challenges try performing the following simple physical tests for balance and posture to help quickly evaluate whether you may currently be limited physically.”

Test #1: “Standing Sway” Balance Test

The purpose of this test is to identify muscle and connective tissue tightness that may be pulling a golfer out of ideal standing posture and balance, thus interfering with his posture and balance during his swing.

Perform the first test as follows:

- First, stand on a level surface with your arms hanging relaxed by your sides.
- Then, close your eyes and gently relax your body so you can attempt to feel which direction your body naturally tends to drift, tip or sway if you would let it.
- After 5-10 seconds, open your eyes and identify the predominant direction of sway.
- Repeat the test several times to determine if you have a consistent direction of sway.

The direction you consistently feel yourself drift, indicates where the tightness and restrictions are located. If uncorrected, this tightness will also pull you out of posture and balance during your swing motion. Any attempts at correcting your swing motion without first reducing the physical causes of your posture and balance dysfunction can lead to inconsistent performance and/or injury.

Test #2: “Club Behind The Spine” Posture Test

Having adequate rotation flexibility in the spine is one of the most essential physical requirements to perform a good golf swing. Most rotation comes from the *thoracic* or middle area of the spine. To have maximal flexibility to turn during the swing, however, your posture at address must also have the physical potential to achieve a straighter thoracic spine. In contrast, a bent thoracic spine at address blocks your ability to turn.

The purpose of this test is to determine your physical ability to achieve and maintain the ideal, straight thoracic spine angle at address.

Perform the second test as follows:

- To begin, stand upright while holding a club behind your back. Hold the head of the club flat against your tailbone with one hand; hold handle of the club against the back of your head with your other hand.
- Then, slightly bend your hips and knees (10-15 degrees) and contract your lower abdominal muscles, as needed, to press the small of your back into the shaft of the club.
- Next, while maintaining complete contact of your lower back to the club shaft, straighten and vertically elongate the middle and upper portions of your spine and neck. The goal is to make complete contact of the entire length of your spine and back of your head with the club shaft.
- Once you have done your best to achieve this position, attempt to bend forward from your hips and knees while maintaining complete club contact with your spine and head. Continue to bend forward until you are able to comfortably see a spot on the ground in front of you where the golf ball would normally be positioned at address.
- A final step for this drill is to remove the club from your back and grip it with both hands in your normal address position while maintaining all the spine, hip and knee angles previously created.

If properly achieved, you should now feel comfortably balanced with muscle activity appropriately felt in your lower abdominals, thighs, hips, upper back and shoulder blades. You will have achieved the ideal, straight, thoracic spine angle for the golf address position with proper degrees of hip and knee bend with the greatest potential for producing a safer and highly effective golf swing.

However, if you are unable to *easily* and *comfortably* perform any portion of this test, it is very likely that you have physical restrictions that are limiting your posture and your swing. Continuing to play golf with a bent upper and middle spine at address will block your natural ability to make a complete turn in your backswing and follow-through. This will then cause you to make adjustments in your swing to compensate for your lack of

ideal rotational motion. Every attempted swing with compensations will place excess stress on your body leading to potential injury and poor or inconsistent performance.

If you have questions about this article or want to find out more about how a Body Balance for Performance® customized fitness training program can help your game, please call 800-473-6211 or visit www.fitgolf.com.