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Siege Social

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Fit to a Tee – Get in the Swing with National Physiotherapy Month!

A game of golf is a healthy activity to help gain and maintain flexibility and range of motion. It's a physical activity that includes walking, lifting and repetitive arm movements, providing the benefits of cardiovascular and strengthening exercise programs. However, returning to action after being on hiatus for several months puts enthusiasts at high risk of injury.

"The golf swing is a complex, explosive and physically stressful movement that requires the full rotational capacity of 127 joints and the dynamic activation and co-ordination of 400 pairs of muscles" remarks Greg Redman, physiotherapist at the University of Calgary Sport Medicine Center in Alberta. "These unique and complex motions create considerable stress on various parts of the body. Statistics show that the lower back and shoulder areas are particularly susceptible to injury amongst golfers. Older golfers are even more susceptible as the aging process tends to reduce flexibility in the shoulders and back by approximately 25%. Fortunately research also shows that these age-related changes are easily reversed through an appropriate golf-specific exercise program. More and more golfers are consulting with physiotherapists for advice with their injuries or are looking for exercise programs to prevent injuries and improve performance."

Golfers need to begin exercising a few weeks in advance of the season, to prepare the body for the activity ahead. Some suggestions include:

- Walking 20-30 minutes a day, three to four times a week;
- Begin practicing your grip on the club;
- Practice your back swing. Keep the club at waist level and slowly increase to a full swing;
- Start with one of the shorter clubs and work up to the longer, heavier irons.

Canadian physiotherapists suggest using the following S.M.A.R.T. tips: Stretch, Move, Add it up, Reduce strain, Talk to a physiotherapist, to get the most enjoyment out of a healthy and active golf season.

STRETCH – BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER ACTIVITY

Stretching – as a warm-up, as a break during repetitive movements and as a cool-down after your golf game – helps you to move easily, keeps muscles flexible and relaxed, joints mobile, and relieves tension and strain. Think of golfing like any other active pursuit that requires an appropriate warm-up and cool-down. When planning your golf game, add proper and effective stretching to the list of tasks.

MOVE – TODAY FOR TOMORROW

A game of golf is an excellent way to get your whole body in motion. Moving properly and efficiently creates less strain on the body – Be aware of posture and body mechanics to help lessen the strain on your body. Minimize lifting and carrying heavy loads.

ADD IT UP – AN HOUR IS POWER

Add up the time spent on the golf course. Planning, pacing and rotating activities frequently eases tension in strained muscles. Take frequent stretch breaks. Change positions and tasks often. If a position or posture is causing problems, move out of it.

REDUCE STRAIN – USE GOLF EQUIPMENT THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Gear – such as your golf shoes, clubs and golf bag – are meant to ease the work, not cause additional strain. Reduce strain by fitting the clubs to the golfer, not the golfer to the clubs – Physiotherapists recommend that golfers choose their golf equipment to match their skill level and body type. Here are a few of their recommendations:

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- Carry your golf bag over both shoulders and walk upright. If you have a one-strap system, alternate sides;
- Push rather than pull a wheeled golf cart;
- hold clubs in a loose, comfortable grip to reduce strain in your hand and forearm;
- When standing for long periods, stand tall and occasionally shift your weight from one foot to the other, or rest one foot on your golf bag or cart.

TALK TO A PHYSIOTHERAPIST – Physiotherapists are the mobility experts for both the fit person who requires specific fitness and injury prevention advice, and for the elderly, injured or disabled person who has specific needs and considerations. With their applied knowledge and understanding of the human body in action, physiotherapists are able to help you to increase mobility, relieve pain, build strength and improve balance and cardiovascular function. A physiotherapist will assess your injury and provide appropriate treatment that will promote an earlier return to your golf game as well as advice on how to prevent recurrence of injury.

For more information on golfing, visit the 'Golfing Tips' page found on the Canadian Physiotherapy Association's web site www.physiotherapy.ca/NPM2004golftips.htm

Since 1984, physiotherapists from across the country have designated time each year to promote physiotherapy in Canada. This united voice brings power to the NPM message and focuses attention on the value of physiotherapy in Canadian Healthcare.

National Physiotherapy Month runs from April 23 to May 23, 2005. For more information about injury prevention, visit the Canadian Physiotherapy Association's web site www.physiotherapy.ca, where you can find more information on golfing, along with the three other accompanying NPM themes – gardening, walking and running.

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