

Kids must play safe

Many children suffer from poor posture and lack of muscle strength. These problems must be addressed if young golfers are to avoid injury

Golf is becoming an increasingly popular choice of sport among younger age groups in New Zealand. The spectacular success of a super-fit Tiger Woods saw an increase in the interest of golf in recent years, and he has been a particular drawcard for young players.

However, young golfers do not always appreciate the physical attributes required to perform the golf swing safely and efficiently. Golf is not perceived as an athletic sport in the way that rugby or cricket is, but, in fact, the stresses on all joints in the body during the golf swing are enormous.

The fact golf is repetitive and one-sided in nature stresses the body immensely and predisposes it to a number of injuries. Can you imagine the impact on your body hitting 100 to 500 balls a day, 500 to 2000 balls a week, 2000 to 10,000 balls a month. That's a lot of twisting and loading on the body.

Alarmingly, most young golfers are severely underdeveloped and weak in the key muscle groups associated with the golf swing. This greatly increases the risk of young golfers developing acute injuries to muscles that then tend to get overused and can affect their development in the sport and contribute to injuries later in

life. It is important for younger players, along with parents and coaches, to be aware of the factors that are contributing to these problems. We want the kids to work on specific 'safe' exercises to help them develop physically.

Activity and posture

It is important kids spend their share of time running around, climbing trees and generally being active; unfortunately, the modern generation of children is becoming a lot more sedentary. More and more kids are spending a lot of time watching TV or playing video games; they spend a lot of time in poor fixed postures. Not only that, but they also spend a lot of time sitting in poor postures during school time and are carrying heavy school bags, frequently on one shoulder.

The body adapts to this and becomes used to poor posture. The postural stabilisers no longer have to work hard, as a consequence of which the body loses its resilience and ability to cope with stresses on it. Basically, the body becomes weaker and less flexible and posture deteriorates.

Poor fixed postures are detrimental to the development of the golf swing as the body ages; in fact, the muscles in the body that are 'lazy' most of the time

through sitting are the very muscles that are so important in creating a safe, strong, efficient and powerful golf swing.

It is important kids and their parents are aware of these issues and introduce strategies to try and minimise the changes and imbalances that can develop through poor posture and/or lack of functional activity.

Growth factor

It is a fact that most kids will have a growth spurt at some stage between the ages of 10 and 20. As the body grows and the individual becomes taller, bones become longer. But sometimes the muscles don't grow as fast as the bones.

Muscles become shorter and tighter and the body consequently becomes less flexible. This is how muscle imbalances can occur that put extra stresses on the muscles and joints in the body. Sometimes muscle shortening affects the alignment of the spine and will increase pressure on the spine, joints and discs.

Other vulnerable areas during growth spurts include muscle tendons, where the muscles join into the bones. The most common tendon injuries we see as a result of growth spurts are in the tendon below



the knee cap (ossgood slatters) and in the Achilles tendon at the heal of the foot (severs disease).

It is during their growth stage that a lot of young golfers spend a huge number of hours practising in a bid to lower handicaps, some with ambitions of becoming professional. The body will continue to change as it grows, and so will the golf swing biomechanics. The body is vulnerable to injury during this time.

Juniors need to learn through this development phase the importance of efficient and productive practice along with equipment matching to ensure progressive improvement and injury prevention. Far too often on the driving range, kids walk into a bay, put down their golf bag, pull out a driver

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and try and hit the ball as hard and as far as they can. While applauding their enthusiasm – and by no means do we want to condemn it – it is important these young players have a periodisation model and performance programme in place.

They should speak with their PGA professional or golf specific physiotherapist about getting a muscle balance assessment and developing a specific stretching and exercise programme to help reduce the chances of growth change injuries.

If you have any questions regarding young players, please feel free to contact our director of physiotherapy Brad Takai brad@instituteofgolf.co.nz or Craig Dixon, director of instruction craig@instituteofgolf.co.nz 📞

Exercise right

Research has shown that junior golfers under the age of nine should focus on developing all fundamental movement skills (FMS), not just golf. FMS are general patterns of movement that combine two or more body segments. They are the 'basic vocabulary of sport'.

Fundamental movement skills can be broken into four categories:

LOCOMOTIVE SKILLS:

Running, jumping, dodging, skipping, hopping, bounding, sprinting;

STABILITY SKILLS (ABCs of athleticism):

Agility, balance, coordination, speed, change of direction, disassociation;

MANIPULATIVE/OBJECT CONTROL SKILLS (ABCs of athletics):

Throw, kick, strike, catch, dribble, dodge;

AWARENESS:

Space awareness, kinesthetic awareness, body awareness, rules.

A child who develops a better base FMS will develop golf skills at a faster rate and will peak at a higher level of expertise.

Circuit exercise programmes for junior golfers should include practice, training and development in all of the above categories to best develop a base of functional movement skills while reducing the risk of developing muscle imbalances or gradual onset injuries from over repetition.

Examples of exercises may include skipping and one-legged hopping, lateral and forward jumping over objects, balancing on beams, Swiss balls and different objects, special and visual type exercises, sprinting and hula hoops.

