

# PhysicianAlert

Physical Therapy and Sports Assessment Center

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## Physical therapy offers effective sports-injury prevention and noninvasive treatment options.

Sports injuries are common, most frequently affecting the neck and back, shoulders, knees and other joints.

### Avoiding sports injuries.

Sports injuries are a part of life, especially those resulting from golf, tennis and other activities that require repetitive motion. Reasons for these injuries include:

- *Poor body mechanics*
- *Lack of, or improper, warm-up prior to participation*
- *Absence of customized exercise programs*
- *Poor nutrition and absence of a consistent daily diet (e.g., the intake of too much caffeine and/or alcohol, smoking and not enough water)*

### Physical therapy can improve golf game.

If you were to ask every golfer walking the course what would help their game, they would probably say a better swing. However, a golfer's physical characteristics play a large part in his or her ability to obtain a consistent swing and to prevent injury. These characteristics include postural symmetry, muscle strength and flexibility, joint stability,

balance, the ability to shift weight appropriately, general body awareness and overall body conditioning.

While professional golfers may be

*The incidence of sports injuries — especially in activities requiring throwing or quick changes of direction — is on the rise.*

*Approximately \$8 billion annually is spent on the treatment of low back injuries.*

*Female athletes are increasingly experiencing ACL injuries, due to training techniques, anatomy and estrogen factors.*

*An overwhelming number of patient complaints to physicians are for shoulder pain, surpassed only by low back and neck pain.*

more aware of the role these characteristics play in their game, amateur golfers may not. Regardless, both levels of golfers experience similar injuries. While professionals typically suffer injuries of a chronic nature related to overuse,

amateur golfers experience more acute injuries and must learn to consider physical factors in developing their swing and avoiding injury.

Golfers should learn how to overcome negative factors affecting their game and musculoskeletal health, including poor posture, too strong or weak grip, inconsistent swing plane, improper weight transfers and hitting shots off-center.

Other bad habits such as improper or incomplete warm-up, excessive practice (e.g., lack of intended goal for practice session and no predetermined amount of balls or time limit to achieve an established goal), practicing without appropriate postural stress-relief techniques and improper equipment or use of equipment can lead to injury. Injury avoidance counseling from a physical therapist is also helpful.

If an injury has already occurred, a physical therapist can implement an individualized treatment plan that employs noninvasive pain-management techniques. For acute injuries, cold-pack therapy and rest may be suggested, followed by appropriate manual and other therapies, stretching techniques, muscle re-education, strength-building techniques, posture correction techniques and education regarding current and potential physical capabilities and limitations.

### Physical therapy offers relief for

## shoulder injuries.

Shoulder injuries in athletics, especially those involving throwing, are very common. Many of these injuries can be treated with physical therapy to balance the strength in the muscles of the shoulders. However, complete tears of the rotator cuff or injuries involving loosening of the ligaments often require surgical intervention.

According to a recent physical therapy industry report, as new equipment and diagnostic and treatment methods are developed, the need for physical therapists will continue to increase. For example, the newest surgical technique for shoulder ligament repair is achieved through laser procedures. Afterward, a specific routine of physical therapy is necessary to help lengthen tissues for greater range of motion and to speed recovery. It is extremely important, however, that this therapy be performed at a slower pace than normally occurs in traditional post-surgical physical therapy. Otherwise, materials used in the laser procedure can be stretched too thin, thereby rendering the surgery unsuccessful.

## Help for the pain of ACL injury.

The anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) is the most commonly injured ligament of the knee. Because sports are an increasing part of life in our country, the number of ACL injuries has steadily increased over the past few decades.

Sports that require the foot to be planted and the body to change direction rapidly carry a high incidence of ACL injuries, including football, basketball and downhill skiing. There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of women who suffer an ACL tear, due in part to increased interest in participating in women's athletics.

Studies indicate female athletes are more likely to suffer ACL injury when compared to their male counterparts, possibly because women tend to train differently than men and, moreover, because of differences in anatomy. One theory suggests the problem stems

from the female ligament not being as strong as a man's due to the effects of estrogen.

Once ACL injury has been determined, rest and elevation of the knee, followed by a regimen of physical therapy, are necessary to correct the swelling and stiffness. However, physical therapy may not work for every patient. More severe cases of ACL injuries may require surgical intervention to correct the condition.

## Weekend warriors.

Patients aged 30 to 55 make up the bulk of the out-of-shape athletes who attempt to compress a week's worth of strenuous exercise into an hour or two on the tennis or basketball court or playing any number of other sports. These people have lost their speed, flexibility and resiliency to injuries, but they have not lost their memories of the fun they used to have. The common ailments that can be improved by physical therapy (as opposed to lost teeth) are strained shoulders, pulled groins and twisted knees. Part of the physical therapist's job is to ensure that the weekend warrior does not treat physical therapy like the sport that caused the accident. That is, the therapy should go steadily, not be rushed, with specific goals set for each session.

## Conclusion.

Sports injuries come in many forms, with low back pain, ACL injuries and repetitive stress topping the list. It has become a major imperative among patients and their physicians to find the least invasive means to treat injuries. The licensed physical therapists at Physical Therapy and Sports Assessment Center offer patients noninvasive treatments to help them manage and overcome the pain of sports injuries and more.

For more information, please contact one of our six convenient locations to serve your patients' needs.

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**BS: (Summa Cum Laude) Physical Therapy, Howard University, Washington, DC**

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**BS: Physical Education/Minor in Biology, South Carolina State College (with honors)**

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