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Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

When your feet aren't in top condition, your golf swing won't be either.

The barrier to a perfect golf swing could lie in your big toe, your heel or the ball of your foot, the three areas of your feet most likely to cause pain that can ruin your swing.

Behind these pain-prone spots can be stiff joints, stretched-out tissues and even nerve damage.

However, pain relief is possible and usually does not require surgery.

So what are the three most common painful foot conditions that golfers deal with?

The first is heel pain, which typically results from an inflammation of the band of tissue that extends from your heel to the ball of your foot. Heel pain can make it uncomfortable for golfers to maintain a solid stance during crucial portions of their golf swing.

People with this condition often compare the pain to someone jabbing a knife in their heel.

The second is arthritis, which causes pain in the joint of your big toe. It can make your golf swing's follow-through difficult.

Finally, neuromas are nerves that become thickened, enlarged and painful because they've been compressed or irritated. During your golf swing, a neuroma in the ball of your foot can cause significant pain when your body transfers its weight from one foot to the other.

So what's a golfer to do?

If you experience pain while golfing, keep these items in your golf bag to get you through the game:

- A good pain relief roll-on gel.
- A ball-of-foot gel cushion.
- A gel heel cup for inside your shoes.

Other painful conditions can also cause instability during your swing. Some athletes and former athletes develop chronic ankle instability from previous ankle sprains that failed to heal properly.

Motion-limiting arthritis and Achilles tendonitis can also affect your balance. Ill-fitting golf shoes may cause corns and calluses that make standing uncomfortable.

For the majority of golfers and other patients, I recommend simple treatments such as custom shoe inserts, stretching exercises, changes to your shoes, medications, braces, steroid injections or physical therapy.

However, if these conservative measures fail to provide adequate relief, surgery may be required.

Foot pain is not normal, especially when golfing. With the treatment options available to your foot and ankle surgeon today, a pain-free golf swing is clearly in view.



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