Tips for Preventing Golfer’s Elbow

Elbow problems, next to lower back pain, are perhaps the most common injuries experienced by amateur golfers. The predisposition for developing elbow pain is due to postural breakdowns, muscle weakness, and flexibility problems. Golfers with these physical challenges have difficulty making a complete shoulder turn, therefore, making compensations in their swings to get the club back to the top. This is when the elbows are most at risk to injury.

The strongest and most stable position for our arms throughout the complete swing is in front of our chest. During the backswing, our shoulder blades should be slightly squeezed, our left arm maintained as straight as possible while our right arm remains relaxed (for a right-handed golfer). Moreover, our hand pressure on the grip of the club should be light yet firm enough to prevent the club from slipping.

Most golfers, however, cannot consistently maintain the ideal “arms in front of chest” relationship because they do not have correct posture at address, they are not flexible enough or strong enough. The typical physical combination of rounded posture at address, poor spinal flexibility, weak stomach, spine, and shoulder muscles will prevent a full shoulder turn.

The most typical compensation made in the full backswing for golfers with incomplete shoulder turn is to allow the arms to travel past the front of the chest. Even if the club is placed in an effective “on plane” position at the top of the swing, allowing the arms to travel beyond the chest is a vulnerable position for both elbows.

Elbow injuries most often occur when the arms disconnect at the top of the backswing. From this deep position, repeated stress is transmitted into one or both elbows during the transition to the forward swing. The damaging force from hundreds of repetitions of an improper swing – especially with clubs that are too heavy or too stiff – can cause traumatic strain and inflammation in the tendons – better known as “tendonitis”.

When the club swings past the chest, the automatic or reflex compensation is to grip the club tighter. Gripping the club tighter provides a feeling of greater strength and club control during the transition to forward swing from the top. Unfortunately, gripping the club harder also sends excess stress to the muscles and tendons of the forearms, which then connect to the elbows. Eventually, an injury occurs.

To prevent elbow tendonitis, stomach muscles, upper back muscles and shoulder blade muscles -- “the core” – are addressed first. Once these muscles have been tested, stretched and strengthened, the muscles of the upper arms, lower arms and hands can be
strengthened. The exercises provided here are samples of strengthening exercises that may help prevent “Golf Elbow”.

1. CHEST STRETCH OVER PILLOW

![Chest Stretch Over Pillow]

**Purpose:** Releases chest tightness, reduces bend in middle/upper spine.

**Benefit:** Improves posture at address and shoulder turn potential.

**Instruction:** Lay over folded pillow(s) positioned across shoulder blades, knees bent and arms up and out. You should feel a stretch across your chest and/or front shoulders. You may increase the stretch by adding more pillows.

**Quantity:** Hold one repetition for at least 3-5 minutes.
2. SUPINE TRUNK ROTATION STRETCH

**Purpose:** Helps improve spine and hip rotation flexibility.

**Benefit:** Improves shoulder turn during backswing and follow-through.

**Instruction:**
- Bend both knees and bring your left arm into the tray position.
  - While keeping that shoulder blade in contact with the floor, rotate both knees away from the elevated arm. You should feel a gentle stretch through your hip, side and lower back.
  - Keep your shoulder blade in contact with the floor.

**Quantity:** Hold for 3-5 minutes and repeat one repetition in both directions.
3. WRIST AND FOREARM STRETCH

Purpose: To increase wrist and forearm flexibility.

Benefit: To improve wrist cocking in the complete backswing.

Instruction:
- Hold a club in front of your body, shoulder width apart, with slight shoulder blade squeeze and palms facing up.
- Bend wrists down until stretch is felt on the inside portion of forearms.
- Turn wrists over and bend wrists down until stretch is felt on the top or outside of the forearms.

Quantity: Hold for 3-5 breaths and perform 3-5 repetitions for each stretch.
4. STANDING ROWING WITH TUBING

Purpose: Strengthens shoulder blade, upper back and arm muscles.

Benefit: Improves posture at address and helps keep arms connected to front of body during the swing.

Instruction: Stand with correct posture – pelvic tilt, shoulder blades back, spine straight and chin tucked. Hold tubing, which is secured in the door, with arms straight out in front so your hands are in the middle of your chest. Squeeze shoulder blades back then bring hands to chest slowly. Hold for 2 – 3 breaths, then, slowly release hands away from your chest while maintaining shoulder blade contraction.

Quantity: Perform 2-3 sets of 10 repetitions.
5. STANDING WRIST/FOREARM STRENGTH

**Purpose:**
Strengthens the muscles of the wrist and forearm.

**Benefit:**
Increase power in forearms at impact position.

**Instruction:**
While standing, hold the putter (or any club) in your right hand at or near the end of the handle with the elbow straight and your palm facing inward. The club head should be pointing forward, in front of your body. Keeping the elbow straight, tilt the wrist up, lifting the clubhead slowly. Hold the end position for 1-2 breaths, then, slowly lower the club to the starting position.

**Quantity:**
Repeat the exercise on both arms for 2-3 sets of 10 repetitions.