

## Fluid Golf Swings and Avoiding Low Back Pain

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Do you dream of having the smooth shoulder turn and full follow through you see with the golf pros on TV, and doing it pain free? And, I imagine that some of the distance that comes from that beautiful swing would be desirable also! I do not pretend to be an expert in teaching the golf swing, but I am an expert in how the body is meant to move.

Low back pain is one of the most common problems that plagues golfers. Many of the biomechanical problems contributing to low back pain also result in a less efficient golf swing.

The golf swing requires significant rotation (turning) of the body. Some parts of the body are naturally designed to rotate or turn. The cervical spine (neck) has the greatest ability to rotate for nearly 180 degrees. The hip joints also have significant rotational movement with the design of the ball of the femur (thighbone) resembling a trailer hitch fitting into a deep socket. The thoracic spine (middle back) has tremendous rotational ability. The feet and eyes also contribute to turning in the golf swing.

The lumbar spine (low back) is NOT designed to rotate. The low back often gets forced into rotating in the golf swing because other joints or muscles aren't doing their share of the work. Think of the body as a system where each part needs to do its share of the work in order for the whole body to function smoothly and efficiently. In the golf swing there can be several culprits interfering with the body's ability to turn. Slacker #1 is often the thoracic spine and slacker #2 is often the hip joints, although there can be many other areas contributing to the limitation of rotation.

One of my favorite areas to work with is the thoracic spine because of its complexity and the significant improvements a person can experience in performance and reduction in pain when everything moves efficiently. The thoracic spine has 12 pairs of ribs attaching to the vertebrae in back and wrapping around ultimately to attach to the sternum (breastbone) in front. Just the word "ribcage" gives the connotation of a rigid "iron cage" that isn't supposed to move, but should. Most commonly, people are hunched in the thoracic spine, called kyphosis. With thoracic kyphosis, rotation in the thoracic spine and mobility of the scapula (shoulder blades) can be very restricted. With that voice in our ear telling us to "straighten up and pull our shoulders back", the result is a sneaky compensatory hyperextension of the low back and a fixing of the shoulder blade muscles, that gives the false appearance of good erect posture, when in actuality, the thoracic spine is still rounded. Good mobility in the foot, hip, thoracic spine, scapulae, and trunk muscles is critical for the loading of forces at the top of the backswing necessary to release the power at ball contact and the follow through of the swing.

Here is a nice lengthening exercise to start. Lie on your back, knees bent, and your arms out to the side at 90 degrees, palms up. GENTLY and with NO PAIN, tilt your right leg to the right and when you feel your pelvis wanting to roll to the right, allow it to go, and it will in turn pull the left leg to the right. Then, tilt your left leg to the left, let the pelvis get pulled to the left, and then the right leg follows to the left. Continue and your head can lazily roll in the opposite direction of the knees. Feel the length through your spine and hips.



The key is to learn to lengthen your body from head to toe and through the spine. The ability to rotate in the thoracic spine and hips will become effortless and you will be on your way to discovering that fluid golf swing you have always dreamed of.