

Robbing Peter to Pay Paul

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“I’ve got to do something about my swing to save my back,” is a common theme I overhear in golfing circles. There are many theories about how to approach back pain via altering the golf swing. One common solution is to reduce the range of the backswing. This decreases rotational torque delivered to the spine.

In one study¹, an electromyographic (EMG) analysis of the muscles of the trunk and shoulders was taken to see what effect a shortened backswing would have on indicators such as club head velocity (CHV) and trunk muscle activation.

The good news was that shortening the backswing by an average of about 45 degrees had no adverse effect on CHV or stroke accuracy. This means the ball would go just as far and be just as accurate as if a full backswing were taken. Also, there was significant reduction in the activity in many of the trunk’s muscles.

Theoretically, this means back pain would be reduced. The premise of this assumption is that fewer trunk muscles firing equates to less back pain. By extension then, no elite golfers would have back pain because they typically recruit fewer muscles during their swing. We all know even elite golfers experience back pain though.

The bad news that surfaced from this study was a trend toward increasing shoulder musculature activation. This means that the shoulders would compensate for a lack of force generated by the hips and trunk, posing a risk of shoulder injury. Typically elbow injuries are closely tied with faulty shoulder mechanics as well.

So what is a golfer to do? Address the *root causes* of back or shoulder pain instead of trying to golf around the problem. Getting trunk muscles to fire less is not necessarily the answer to fixing back pain. Instead, it is getting muscles to fire appropriately in terms of strength and timing. This is simpler than it sounds.

Regarding the shoulder, answers lie in restoring proper range of motion and strength of a few key muscle groups. You will be surprised at how quickly shoulder or back pain, melt away once a little attention is paid to the right muscles.

1. The short golf backswing: effects on performance and spinal health implications. Bulbulian R, Ball KA, Seamon DR. [J Manipulative Physiol Ther.](#) 2001 Nov-Dec;24(9):569-75.