

Putting Putting Practice in its Place

By Rick Olderman MS, PT, CPT

It's a beautiful sunny morning and you've arrived a half hour early for your tee off. Great time to get in some putting practice before your game right? Well, maybe not. According to a recent study¹ 40 minutes of putting practice significantly affects swing kinematics in professional and elite golfers (those with a handicap of 0-8). The study reports that trunk extensor muscles fatigued, peak club head speeds decreased, swing duration increased and movement coordination was affected.

What's more is that golfers with a higher body mass index (BMI) experienced fewer affects than those with a lower BMI (generally heavier people have higher BMI's than thinner people). This resulted in more complaints of low back pain (LBP) in golfers with a low BMI. LBP is ubiquitous in golf however this need not be the case. Even changing how you practice can apparently affect your pain.

Prolonged putting affects the trunk extensors which are active during the backswing and downswing (trunk extensor muscles are found on either side of the spine). Elite golfers rely on a stretch-shorten cycle of the extensor muscles to generate club head speed during these phases of swing. By assuming more of a flexed trunk position during putting, trunk extensor muscles are stretched which removes a key element of this cycle.

What to do? Based on this study, putting practice should be either shortened or more rest taken before tee off. Exercising the trunk extensor muscles and leg muscles to improve endurance would also be a good solution. This together with a good strengthening, stretching and endurance program could do wonders for your game and your pain.

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1. Evans K, Refshauge K, Adams R, Barrett R. Swing Kinematics in Skilled Male Golfers Following Putting Practice. *JOSPT*. 2008;38:425-33.