

Golf Health and Fitness

Article: Golf after a Knee Replacement

A knee replacement can not only be physically taxing on you but psychologically depressing. The years of discomfort and pain that you try to put up with as the knee continues to deteriorate, from the constant demands of weight bearing forces, and continuous stress on the supporting ligaments and muscles leads you to the ultimate decision to have surgery or not to have surgery.

When conservative measures fail to restore mobility and decrease pain, through physical therapy, non steroidal anti inflammatory medications, or cortisone injections, then surgery is the next alternative.

The Knee is a hinge joint supported by cruciate and collateral ligaments and reinforced by the quadriceps, hamstrings and gastrocnemius muscle groups. They help to provide stability to the knee joint. The meniscus (cartilage) helps to cushion and absorb shock from compressive forces lies between the tibia and femur. The patella (knee cap) is embedded in the quadriceps tendon and allows for a greater mechanical advantage during knee extension, due to its location.

Golfers find it a burden to play with a degenerative knee joint, because they can't pivot very well, due to pain and continuous loss of stability. Distance and accuracy start to suffer and then the golfer starts to lose interest in playing.

During the initial stages of a degenerating knee, there is swelling and some discomfort around and inside the knee. As the process continues, there are increased arthritic changes occurring, the cartilage loses its integrity to give adequate support to the joint, the swelling and discomfort increases, and the supporting structures around the knee strain to give support to the joint. Finally there becomes a noticeable deformity on how the tibia is positioned in comparison to the femur. The pain at times becomes unbearable, the grinding increases and mobility and weight bearing activities diminish . This would be a good time to have surgical intervention.

After surgery, there will be discomfort, swelling and pain with weight bearing activities. Depending on the physician and the procedure, usually you will need crutches or a walker for a while, in order to protect the surgical knee. Touch down to partial weight bearing is usually indicated for a few weeks. Restoring range of motion, while controlling the swelling is of first importance. Non weight bearing exercises are first given to start building up the strength around the knee, and progressed to weight bearing activities.

In order for golfers to enjoy the game again after a knee replacement, it may take months before the integrity of the knee is strong enough to handle the grind again. Even though you are feeling good there is still a critical period for healing that must be addressed.

I have had some patients in the past start back too quickly and it took them several months to start up again because they were too anxious. Even though you have gone

through some physical therapy and have restored mobility and function, you must take into consideration that golf is played on unforgiving angles. If all you did was strengthen in a single plane at a time, your knee is still susceptible to injury, if you haven't prepared it to handle rotational forces in all 3 planes. This takes time to build up to.

Using cable machines, balance boards and swiss balls are good tools to use to restore integrity to the knee. They will challenge you in all planes of movement, and there is a progression that is carefully followed, to insure that balancing out the rest of the body occurs.

Once starting back to golf, it is important to start back slow. You may want to start with high irons first and watch how many buckets that you have used. Starting with a small bucket would be a good start, and then progress from there.

Playing an actual round of golf should only be attempted, after you have successfully warmed up and have not experienced any pain or discomfort from hitting ball at the driving range.

Wear soft spikes, and be aware of the conditions that you will be facing, such as weather and ground surface changes.

If you have had a knee replacement please seek out a physician's approval before attempting to play golf.

Michael K Butler B.A; P.T.A.; CSCS
Director of SwingFit (in the Sports Club Center)
Rancho Physical Therapy
760 674 0675
www.swingfit.org