

Barriers to Performance: Part 2 of 4

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I have yet to meet a golfer who is satisfied with their game. Every golfer wants to play better. The 25-handicapper wants to break 90; the 12-handicapper wants to break 80; and the tour pros need to lower their scoring averages to avoid losing their playing privileges for next season. Golf's famous elite are trying to play better to qualify for a spot on the Ryder Cup team or the Tour Championship at the end of the year.

No matter what their level of play, your patients want to play better.

Unfortunately, improvement in golf is hard to come by. In fact, only one half of one percent of the world's 40 million golfers can play the game at par. The average score for 18 holes of golf is over 100.

The purpose of this four-part series is to help you, the treating physician, understand your golf patient's barriers to performance.

There are four primary barriers to performance:

- Physical Pain
- Emotional Stress
- Environmental Allergens
- Poor Nutrition

Emotional Stress: Your patient's ability to concentrate is critical to playing a good round of golf. Concentration is defined as the ability to focus your attention on what you want for as long as you want. Emotional stress is a barrier to your patient's ability to concentrate. Problems at work or at home often carry over to the golf course. When swinging the club, the only thought to keep in the mind is the target (a spot in the fairway, placement on the green, the back of the cup). When the game goes bad, you will find the target is the last thing in the mind of your patient.

In addition, emotional stress will cause a physical tightening of the muscles of the body. To swing the club with freedom of movement, golf muscles must be warm, loose and quick. Playing golf with anger, resentment or grief results in golf muscles that are cold, tight and slow. The result is high scores and a feeling of frustration by the very game your patient decided to play for relaxation.

As a treating physician working with golfers, ask your patients what they think about when they swing the club. You'll hear everything from, "I never really thought about it" to very specific swing thoughts like, "I'm keeping my left arm straight" or "I'm trying not to straighten my back leg."

Remember - when swinging the club, the only thought to keep in the mind's eye is the image of the target.

This is a great challenge because, in golf, we don't look at the target when we swing the club. We look at the ball. It takes practice to keep your attention on the target in the distance while trying to

hit the ball at your feet.

Encourage your patients to practice at the driving range and to play their round of golf while holding the image of the target in their mind's eye every time they swing the club. Not only will they play better, but in using this technique, they will forget their troubles ... at least for a while.

In part 3 of this series, I will address the issue of environmental allergens as a barrier to performance.

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