Golfers With Knee Pain: It Might Be Arthritis Transcript

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Introduction: Knee Pain and Golf

What if the thing that's quietly messing with your golf game has been hiding inside your knee all along? You still love this game, mostly, but lately it's been coming with a catch.

You've tried the brace, you're icing it after your rounds, You skipped a tee time or two with you friends because it aches. you've got ibuprofen in your bag that sits right next to your tees and now you are taking it before you play just to stay ahead of it.

And it mostly works until about the seventh or eighth hole. And then by the time you step off the ninth, that familiar ache is right there. Nothing dramatic, just that dull, nagging reminder that something is not quite right.

You're still having a good time, you're enjoying the sunlight, the social time. But part of your brain is somewhere else. half in the conversation with your buddies and it's half just waiting for that knee to ease up.

If that sounds familiar to you, hit subscribe. Every week I help golfers understand what's going on and how to stay on the course for free. No fluff because that low grade annoyance, it has a name and its worth knowing.

Now here's what nobody is telling me. That ache that's inside your knee is not just age, it isn't something that you have to just accept as part of getting older.

It is your body sending you a very specific message and it has a cause and a fix. The rust inside you knee, is stealing the game you love. And I think it's time we talk about it.

What Knee Arthritis Is

I'm Dr. Gayan Puvendor. I am an orthopedic physician, a golf lover, and for the last 15 years I've helped thousands of golfers stay on the course without resorting to surgery.

If you've been here before, we've tackled the medial meniscus and the MCL. We're going to go a little deeper into that joint. Today what we're talking about is knee arthritis, what it actually is, why golf accelerates it, and what you can do right now to protect what have left and keep playing the game that you love.

So pull up a chair, grab a seat, because I think this one really matters. Let's start with the big question. What actually are arthritis? Here's what's happening inside.

Your knee is covered with something called articular cartilage. Articular is just fancy doctor talk for something that's at the joint. And normally it's smooth and it shiny and its slippery like ice.

The best way to visualize this is think of the white glossy surface at end of a chicken bone. That's cartilage. It's entire job is to absorb the shock and let your bodies glide past each other without friction.

Now arthritis happens when that cartilages starts to break down. When arthritis sets in, that surface gets thinner, It gets rough, it gets ragged, and eventually you start hearing about something called bone grinding on bone, which is exactly where that deep aching and sometimes even sharp pain is coming from.

That's your knee and that's arthritis. So let me give you a picture that is going to stick around with you. Think about a door hinge. Brand new from the store, it swings smooth and silently, and it's effortless.

That was your knee when you were younger. Now, picture that same hinge after years of rain and heat and cold. It gets stiff. it gets creaky. You try to force it open and grinds.

Old hinges give you twinges, and for you golfers, those twingers show up right when you need that knee the most.

Why Golf Strains an Arthritic Knee

Now, where do you feel it? Most golf players that talk to me with knee arthritis describe it as a deep, dull ache, usually on the inside of the knee or in the front.

They will complain to be about stiffness in morning, kind of like a hinge that needs about 10 minutes to warm up before it starts to work properly. They may complain about pain that's worse after sitting for a long time and then standing up.

And specifically for golfers, that grinding, burning sensation that starts to creep in around the sixth or seventh hole and really starts get angry by around ninth.

Does any of that sound familiar to you? If it does, I want you to know that it's not just aging. It is actually a mechanical problem. and mechanical problems fortunately have solutions.

So why is golf so hard on an arthritic knee? Here's what makes golf uniquely brutal on arthridic knees. And this is where it gets really interesting for somebody like me.

For a right-handed golfer, your left knee or your lead knee is the anchor of your entire swing. So during your golf swing, there are two very specific things that happen to that knee, both of which are absolutely devastating if there's already arthritis present.

Problem number one is rapid rotation. Now during you backswing, your left knee has to rotate inwards towards your body. We call that adduction. Then on the downswing it has rapidly rotate away from your buddy.

You call it abduction, back and forth, snap, every single swing. Now, imagine that on a fresh, healthy hinge. It's fine, a little wear over time, but not even noticeable.

Now imagine the same motion on that rusty hinge, that snap and twist isn't just stress, it's grinding, scraping, the rough, ragged cartilage catching on itself with every rotation.

That's why golfers with arthritis often feel a sharp twinge mid-swing. right at impact. Problem number two is compressive load. So on top of rotation, during your downswing, you're also driving your entire body weight forward onto your lead leg.

Hip-Knee Self Test and Diagnosis Differences

That forces going through the joints at Impact and it's significant. We're talking up to four times your bodyweight. Remember me, I'm 200 pounds, that's 800 pounds of bodyweigh going though that knee.

When my cartilage is healthy or your cartilages healthy, no problem. It absorbs it, it bounces right back. But when the cartledge is thin or it's starting to go away in spots, that force gets directly into the bone.

And that's where the pain makes you wince on your follow through. That's the ache that doesn't go way after the round. So between the rapid rotation and the compressive load, your arthritic left knee is fighting a war on two fronts every time you step up to the tee.

Okay, I want you to do something here with me. This is our self test. If you're sitting down, please stand up. You're going to a quick test that takes about 10 seconds and can tell you a lot about what's happening on your swing.

Here is what I call the hip knee connection. Number one, stand on you left leg only. Slightly bend the knee. Just a little softness, just like you are getting ready to address, not a deep squat.

Try to rotate your hip. Slowly turn them to the right like you're starting your backswing. What did you feel? If your hips feels tight, like it's hitting a wall before your head can fully rotate, that is a huge red flag.

Here's why. Your body needs rotation to swing a golf club. If you hip isn't giving it to you, your knee is going to try. your knee will twist extra hard to make up for what your hip is not doing.

And for an arthritic knee, every single extra degree of rotation is more scrape of bone on bone or rough cartilage. Did you feel a pinch in the knee when you tried that?

Did feel pull? Was there any discomfort? That is your body telling you exactly where the problem is and now you know what to do about it. Now, I know some of you have watched my MCL video at my meniscus video, and you might be sitting there thinking, Dr.

Prevendor, how do I which one that I have? It's a great question, so let me do a really quick breakdown for you. MCl pain, as we talked about before, lives on the inside edge of the knee.

It is often sharp and localized, you can usually put a finger right on spot.

On-Course Fixes and Off-Course Exercises

It feels like a pull or instability when you're shifting your weight, and it often happens after a specific awkward swing or a tweak or stumble or an overreach.

Meniscus pain, a little deeper inside the joint. It's often mechanical. The knee catches, it clicks, It locks during rotation. There's a sharp, specific, nagging pain, and it often gets worse the more that you use it.

Arthritis pain is a little different. It's little more diffused, it's broader, deeper, a littler duller. it builds over the round rather than hitting you all at once.

Worst first thing in the morning, then it loosens up, but then comes right back after a sustained hard activity. Doesn't follow one specific tweak per se, its been creeping in for years.

Now, if you're not sure which one you have, go see a doctor and get some imaging or get an exam. Knowing the difference is the first step. So let's talk about some quick fixes that you can do on the course.

This is a part that came for, right? What can you actually do about it? Well, let start with what you change right now, today, on The Course. Quick fix number one is flare your lead foot.

Remember that door hinge analogy? This fix is like oiling the hinge right before you use it. Before you swing, turn your left foot towards your target about 20 or 30 degrees.

This helps open up the door at the hip and allows your hip rotation to guide your swing rather than being forced through your knee. Less twist at knee means less grinding and it means more pain.

It's really that direct. Try it on the range first and I think you'll feel a difference immediately. Quick fix number two is shorten your backswing. A full aggressive backsing demands maximum rotation.

So if your hips are stiff and your knee is arthritic, a long backsling is not going to be your friend right now. Do a three quarter back string with a more controlled rotation.

This will reduce the stress on that lead knee dramatically. Yeah, you're going to lose a little bit of distance, but you are going gain a lot of pain free holes down the road.

So now let's talk about what you can do off the course because the best protection for the arthritic knee is the muscles surrounding it. Stronger muscles mean less load on the joint and less pain.

Here are five of my favorite exercises that I recommend to all of golfing patients. Exercise number one is a straight leg raise. Lie on your back, lift your left leg while keeping it straight.

This is going to help build that quadricep muscle, that's the muscle on the front of your thigh, without putting any pressure on you knee joint itself.

Think of it like strengthening the support beams of you door without rattling the rusty hinge. Exercise number two is hamstring stretches. Hamstrings that are tight pull on the back of your knee and they add extra stress during your follow through.

So flexible hamstrings will really take that load off. Even 30 seconds a day makes a difference. Exercise Number Three is step ups. Use the bottom stair or a really small step.

Step up slowly with control. This mimics the late shift that you do in your golf swing and trains your leg to handle it with less compensating stress on the knee.

Exercise number four is calf raises. Strong calf rises stabilize your lower leg. So when your calf is doing the job, your knee doesn't have to fight to stay aligned during your rotation.

And number five, our favorite, glute strengthening, hip bridges. this one is really underrated. Lie on your back, Bend your knees and push your hips towards the ceiling.

Warning Signs and Final Takeaways

Strong gluteal muscles can take the rotation off of your knee. Remember, when the hip is weak, the knee picks up the slack. Build the hips, protect the knees.

Now if you've noticed, none of these require a gym membership. These are just five minutes a day. Your knee will thank you by the 18th hole. Now, I want to be straight with you here because I'd rather be honest than just tell you what you want hear.

Arthritis is manageable and you can keep playing, but there are certain warning signs that mean that your body is telling you very loudly that it needs more than this YouTube video.

Here are your red lights. Number one, if your knee gives out or buckles when you shift your weight. number two, you hear a loud pop followed by intense pain or swelling.

Number three, your knee is physically locking up. It's getting stuck and it's refusing to straighten. Number four, you can't bear weight on it. You can walk to the next hole or to your golf cart and you cant stand comfortably.

And number six, the joint looks different. It's visibly deformed or it looks like it's out of place. Don't trade your long-term mobility for that one more round of golf.

And I mean that. The game will always be there. Your knee, if you ignore it long enough, might not be. All right, so let's bring this all together. Your left knee is the anchor of your golf swing.

When arthritis sets in, when that hinge starts to get a little rusty, every rotation, ever ounce of body weight you drive through that joint can cause you or cost you.

The pain you feel is real and it has a cause. Tight hips shift the load to the knee that it can't handle. Rapid rotation scrapes already damaged cartilage.

And all of that is fixable, or at the very least, it's very manageable with the right mechanics and the muscles. Flare that lead foot, strengthen those glutes, do your leg raises, and please listen to your body when it is flying the red flags.

Now it time for my standard disclaimer. Yes, I am a medical doctor, but I'm not your medical. Not yet, anyway. If your knee hurts, go see a professional in person.

This information is meant for education, not specific medical advice for your situation. Now, if you found this video helped you, please hit like and subscribe because every week I'm coming back here to help you stay on the course.

And if have a specific question about your need or your swing, drop it in the comments because I am reading them all. I m Dr. Gayan Puvendran and I ll see you on The Fairway.