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Views and insights on Golf & Medicine

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The Green Magazine]

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QUESTIONS FOR THE COURSE: TACKLING HEALTH, HABITS AND HYGIENE

1. *I often put a tee in my mouth between shots during a round of golf. I've heard that this is potentially harmful – is this true?*

Actually, yes – and it goes beyond the risk of simply swallowing the tee!

Modern pesticides and fertilizers used on golf courses have been thoroughly tested and are considered safe when used appropriately, thus presenting almost no risk with *casual* exposure. Still, it's probably not a good idea. Putting these chemicals in your mouth goes well beyond "casual." In addition, many courses irrigate with sewage plant wastewater, so *bacterial contamination* is also an issue.

Most pesticides are applied wet, and, once dry, will fortunately not *easily* come off grass or vegetation. And, though watering immediately after a pesticide application can reduce the amount of pesticide residue in the air, golfers seem to absorb far more residue through their skin than through the air, especially on the lower legs.

Public health officials recommend the following:

- Talk to the course superintendent about scheduled pesticide applications – what's being used, and precautions being taking. Most of today's superintendents are highly educated and knowledgeable professionals.
- Avoid playing early on pesticide application days.
- Never place tees or golf balls in your mouth.
- Avoid placing cigars, cigarettes, or food on the ground.
- Wash hands and forearms after the round
- Wear long pants when the weather allows

2. *I have asthma. What precautions should I be taking before and during a round of golf?*

Asthma is defined as inflammation and narrowing of the bronchial tubes, causing wheezing and shortness of breath. It can begin at any age. It's *most important* for you to identify what causes your symptoms. Possible triggers can include pollen or mold; air pollutants or irritants; cigarette smoke; exercise; exposure to cold air; medications; respiratory infections; food preservatives (sulfites); or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Regarding exercise-induced asthma (EIB – "B" for *bronchospasm*), golf is one of the sports *least likely* to trigger EIB, due to its nature of brief bursts of activity followed by

adequate rest periods. However, if you are having problems during a round of golf, try the following:

- a "pre-treatment" with an inhaled medicine – some newer medications can last up to six hours.
- Bring a short-acting inhaler with you.
- Monitor your asthma during the round, primarily using a *peak flow meter* -- a hand-held device measuring how fast you blow out air. Check your peak flow before and during the round.
- Take extra precautions on days with high pollen counts or pesticide applications.

And remember, you're not alone -- one in ten athletes is affected by EIB! Take control of your asthma, by talking to your doctor and developing an action plan. You should be able to participate in *any* sport you choose.

3. *Even when I start out playing well, I often lose my focus and become fatigued late in the round. Could this have to do with what I'm eating?*

Definitely. Nutrition is vital to performance in any sport, and golf is no exception. And, what you eat can affect you mentally as well as physically.

If you walk, golf is a five mile hike – and obviously more strenuous if you carry your clubs. Even if you ride, it's still a long excursion. Maintaining energy levels is the key to enhancing endurance and focus during the round.

Let's begin with hydration. This should start before the round. Never wait until you're actually thirsty to drink. And remember, alcohol and caffeine are diuretics, which can actually cause *dehydration*.

As for food, try what many tour pros do:

- Before the round, for sustained energy, eat foods rich in unprocessed "carbs," which are broken down more evenly. Try oatmeal, whole grains, low-fat yogurt, peanut butter, or eggs.
- Pack foods for quick energy and better focus during the round – energy bars, fruit, and sports drinks work well.
- After the round, for recovery, try a bagel or rice cakes.

Remember, coffee and a donut before the round, followed by a hot dog and a beer at the turn, may taste good, but may also wreak havoc on how you feel – and on your score!

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