

# The wounded golfer



**BY DENNISE HUTTON**  
**GOLF AUSTRALIA TEACHING EDITOR**

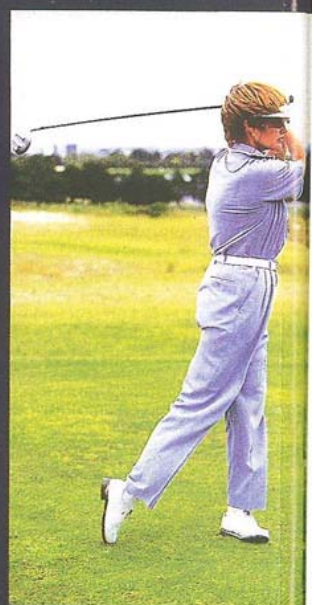
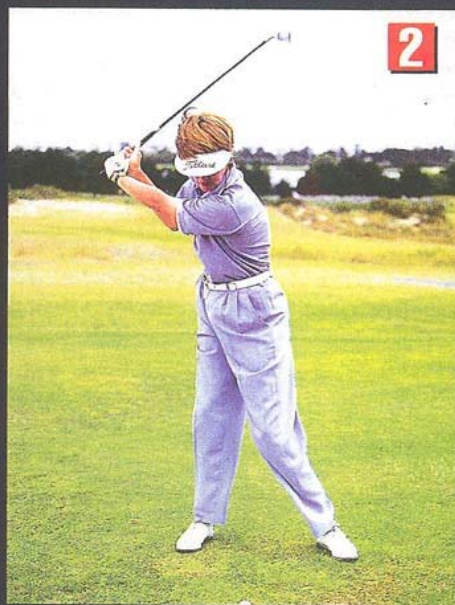
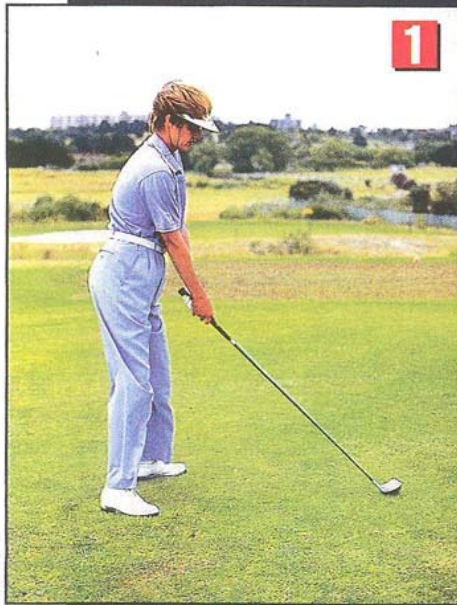
**W**ith Aussie Rules footballers it's their knees, rugby league players their groins, tennis players their elbows and golfers their backs.

For every sport there seems to be a standard alibi that is accepted as an explanation for missing a game or returning a sub-standard performance. Golf is no exception.

Don't be fooled, though, into thinking bad backs and arthritis are ailments of the "oldies" - the combination of a swing fault and over-practice can hasten these problems in even a 30-year-old golfer.

But thank goodness ours is a non-contact sport and we can generally find a way to work around our injuries so we can continue playing.

Providing we retain a basic level of fitness and warm up regularly before play, we should all be able to play the game until we go to the grave!



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## Coping with arthritis

Some basic preliminary work will provide relief from this debilitating disease.

Oversize grips (pic 4) are available from all specialist golf suppliers. These grips can be built up with extra papers to accommodate just about any grip thickness required. The aim is to provide a grip that the player can hold, rather than one which is ideal for their hand size.

The thicker the grip required, the harder it is to hold in the traditional method and the more I recommend the use of the baseball palm grip (pic 5).

Lie the shaft along the lifeline of your right hand before gripping lightly with your left. The back of the left hand points right of target with your thumbs pointing down the shaft at address.

If you have the double whammy of arthritis and a bad back try investigating the swing mechanics of Canadian professional Moe Norman. By combining a baseball bat grip and an "axe chopping" swing, Norman has earned the reputation as the world's greatest ball striker while never having a back problem in his 50-plus years of playing.



## Other tips to avoid back problems:

- \* Use longer shafts and lightweight materials in your clubs.
- \* Use more flexible shafts and lower compression balls.
- \* Replace long irons with fairway metal woods.
- \* On the greens mark, replace and retrieve your ball while bending from the knees.
- \* Use a suction cup on the end of your putter to retrieve the ball from the cup.
- \* Use a broomstick putter.
- \* In bunkers, pick the ball clean to avoid resistance.
- \* Push rather than pull your trolley.
- \* If possible walk rather than use a cart.
- \* If you carry your bag, use a stand to avoid bending to pick up a heavy weight after every shot.

## Adapting to a bad back

The most obvious adjustment for a golfer with a bad back is to stand a little taller at address (pic 1). If you are not bending as much from your hips your swing plane will be more upright, with your hands higher than usual at address.

To help relieve back strain during the backswing, turn your right foot out a little to reduce tension and assist the shoulder coil.

You need to work on gaining a full coil, turning so that your left shoulder is positioned under your chin at the top of the backswing. If this causes a few pangs

in the lower back, it's okay to allow your left heel to lift a little, as it would naturally (pic 2).

Ensure the address-position body angle is maintained through the swing and work on rhythm rather than length of backswing.

You can take most of the strain off your back by finishing tall on the follow-through (pic 3). Keep your back straight with all the weight across and above your left (front) leg.

Your back will remind you the emphasis is on smooth and easy rather than power and brute strength.

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