

Returning to Golf Following Spine Surgery: Preliminary Results

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BACKGROUND

Back injuries account for 25% of all golf-related injuries.¹ Despite this high prevalence, little information exists in the literature on when and how to safely return the golfers who have to have a spinal operation to play. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of when players of all skill levels can return to golf following spine surgery. Secondarily, the data obtained in this study can help establish benchmarks related to ability to return to golf after these procedures.

METHODS

Study Design:

- Electronic, retrospective questionnaire assessing golf performance prior to injury and at varying points in time throughout the post-surgical recovery period

Participants:

- 18-89 years old
- Played at least one 18-hole round of golf per year
- Underwent a cervical or lumbar laminectomy or microdiscectomy, 1-level lumbar fusion, cervical disc replacement (CDR), or anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF)
- Had surgery between January 2019 and July 2023

Outcomes:

- When participant returned to golfing 9- and 18-hole rounds
- Assessed pre-injury and at multiple post-surgical time points:
 - Club distance for each individual club
 - Handicap
 - Symptomology while playing golf

Statistical Analysis:

- Paired two-sample t-tests

RESULTS

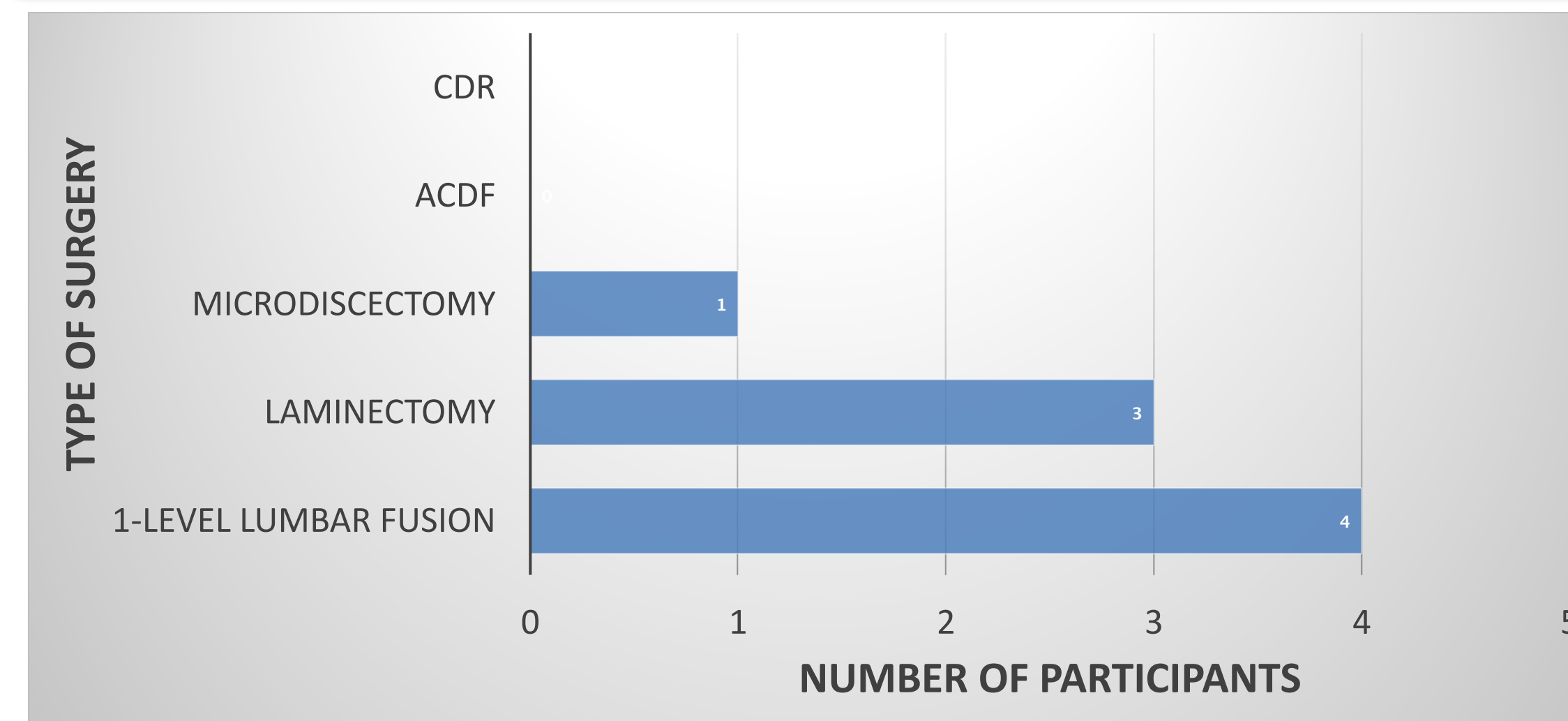


Figure 1. Distribution of Type of Surgery

Demographics:

- Average age: 64.25 years (range: 51-78 years)
- 7 male, 1 female

Data:

- **75%** of golfers (n=6) returned to golfing 9-holes at 5-7 months post-operation on average
- **62.5%** of golfers (n=5) returned to golfing 18-holes at 5.8-7.8 months post-operation on average
- 25% of golfers (n=2) who were greater than 12-months post-operation had not returned to golfing on a course at all

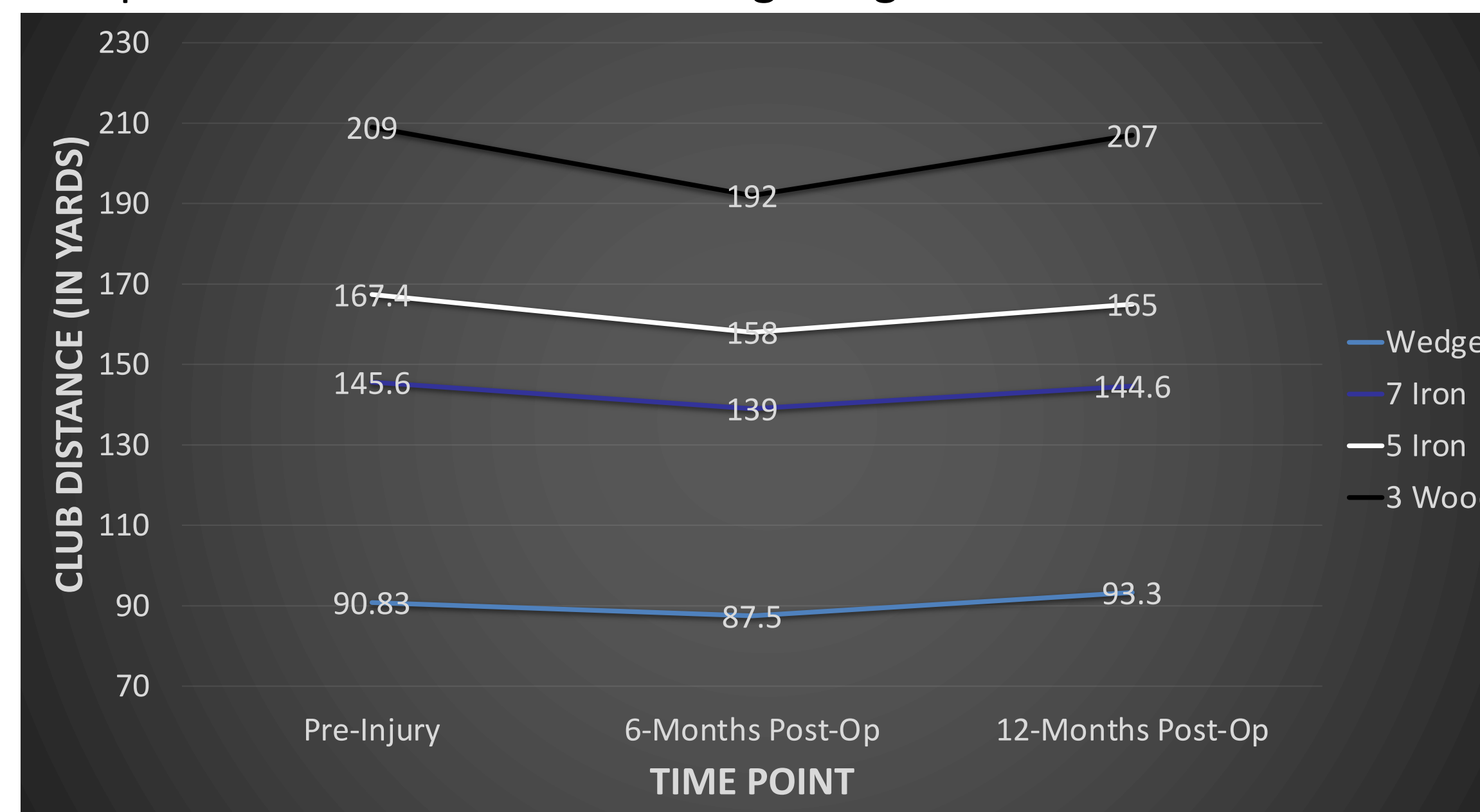


Figure 2. Change in Average Club Distances Throughout Recovery

DISCUSSION

General trends indicate a near complete recovery of ability to hit the golf ball by 12+ months post-operation, however, there is no statistically significant difference between any of the average distances when comparing pre-injury to both post-operation time points due to small sample size. More time and continued data collection is necessary to draw more concrete conclusions. Once completed, this investigation will serve as a launching point for future studies examining biomechanical changes in the golf swing pre- and post-injury/surgery. This will ultimately help guide clinicians on how to advise golfers who undergo spinal surgery on when and how to safely return to play.

CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary data shows that...

1. The majority of golfers return to playing 18 holes between 5.8-7.8 months
2. Most return to near pre-injury levels of club distance performance at 12+ months post-operation.

More data collection within this investigation will help better discern whether the timing of this return to play is safe and how these golf-game metrics differ based on type of spinal operation the golfer had.

SOURCES

McHardy, A. J., Pollard, H. P., & Luo, K. (2007). Golf-related lower back injuries: an epidemiological survey. *Journal of chiropractic medicine*, 6(1), 20–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcme.2007.02.010>