

How can you tell when your irons need to be replaced?

[David Dusek](#) May 2, 2017 1:21 pm



Some pieces of golf equipment perform great year after year, while others slowly deteriorate in performance the more they are used.

Putters, for example, don't wear out, and some golfers love the feel of their old putter grip that might be worn out in places. Fairway woods also tend to stay in a player's bag for a long time. Wedges, meanwhile, lose their ability to grab the ball and spin it as their grooves lose sharpness – on the PGA Tour it is common for a player to go through three or four sand wedges in a season.

Irons seem to fall into a strange limbo. How can a recreational player know when his or her irons are no longer capable of performing well and need to be replaced?

Most pros on the PGA Tour change to the newest clubs from their brand or replace their old irons with a fresh set of the same clubs at the end of every season, because they practice and play so often. And their irons do not wear out evenly. Just like with amateurs, they tend to practice most with the same one or two clubs, such as a 4-iron and 7-iron, so those clubs wear out faster than the others.



Adam Scott hits so many solid iron shots that he wears through his irons in about a season. (Rob Schumacher-USA TODAY Sports)

“When a Tour player hits a certain shot with his wedge, he knows that it’s going to hit the green and roll out 2 feet, or hit the green and roll out 10 feet. When it stops doing that, that’s when pros get new wedges,” said Nick Sherburne, founder and master clubbuilder at Club Champion. “For amateurs, that’s hard because they don’t know if the ball is going to roll out 10 feet or 40 feet. That’s where it gets difficult with irons, too.”

Sherburne’s point is most recreational players do not have a consistent swing

and do not make consistent contact, so judging the gradual deterioration of irons can be tricky.

As grooves in irons slowly wear over time, different shortcomings arise. Theoretically, a shot hit with an iron that has worn grooves will have less spin. On some shots that produces a knuckleball that swerves off line. Other shots hit with the same club might launch higher, then fall short of the distance expected.

“Chances are there is a combination of things happening as your irons age,” Sherburne said. “Obviously the grooves are not worn out everywhere, and amateurs hit it all over the face, so you’re getting a plethora of golf shot inconsistencies.”

Here are three things to do if you are not getting the performance from your irons that you expect.

1. Inspect the grooves. This one is simple: Keep your clubs clean. Too many players attempt shots with dirty clubs. Grass and debris gets stuck in the grooves. Remove it with a tee or brush to expose as much of the groove edges as possible. Use a damp towel to keep clubs clean.



Branden Grace's Callaway irons. (David Dusek/Golfweek)

2. Get the lofts checked. “This is what I tell people all the time, and it is one of the most important things to do as a spring tune-up,” Sherburne said. He recommends recreational players have their iron lofts checked at least once a year, because playing and practicing (especially on mats) can slowly bend irons. It is not unusual for pros to have their lofts checked monthly. With use, iron lofts tend to increase, so shots fly higher and lose distance. But these changes can happen unevenly through a set. If you have two irons that seem to fly the same distance, chances are good their lofts are too close. A good custom-fitter can return each iron to its original loft.

3. Talk with a PGA of America professional or a clubfitter about the lie angle of your irons. When a fitter checks iron lofts, he or she normally checks the lie angle, too. If you have been taking lessons or if your swing has changed since you purchased your irons, the lie angle of your irons may not match for your new move. Ideally, you should get a dynamic fitting

that involves hitting off a lie board or using special tape affixed to the sole of an iron. If the impact tape is marked in the toe, a player will tend to miss to the right, so a fitter likely will try to bend the lie angle slightly more upright. If the toe comes up and the tape is marked near the heel at impact, the lie angle likely needs to flatter. Adjusting the lie angle irons is a simple, relatively easy way to hit straighter shots and regain some performance benefits from clubs.