

Fit for the Links:

How exercise can elevate your golf game.

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The Picture of the Modern Golfer

There he stands at the tee, the paradoxical golfing man. He has all the latest and greatest in golfing gear; from head to toe he's an equipment manufacturer's dream. But as he draws back that \$450 scientifically crafted driver, he has to swing around one major obstacle...his belly. It is here that irony lies, along with a few six packs and years of channel surfing. An athlete he is not, the typical American male. Yet these same guys who have trouble putting their socks on are out swinging a long titanium shaft at high velocities without any prior conditioning. Well, get ready golfing men, because big change is coming. The tide isn't just turning, there is a tidal wave hitting golf: *fitness conditioning*. Just as Tiger Woods has revolutionized the way we look at the game, he has transformed the way golfers prepare for competition. Tiger and his peers have added serious strength and conditioning programs to their busy tour schedules, and it has elevated the game. These guys aren't hitting the "19th Hole" after they're done, they're going to work with their personal trainers.

Improve Your Game with Exercise

Golf is a rare blend of power, agility, and finesse. It is because of this that an exercise program that enhances golf performance needs to be carefully designed. All too frequently, golfers will go into the gym and follow the routines of bodybuilders, only to find their golf games worsen. This leaves many potential exercisers fearful of working out, especially with weights. However, it is not the training that is the problem, but rather the application. Here are a few tips to be considered in any golf-enhancement program:

The Core - The key area that should be strengthened is the midsection, or the core. It is often referred to as the core because it the central station of the body where all movement is generated and controlled. Even though the arms are the main parts moving, they are only as strong as the hips, abdominal, and back muscles they are attached to. These muscles need to be trained dynamically, statically and in all planes of motion.

Free Movement - There are many machines on the market and in gyms that are designed to isolate individual parts of the body. These machines serve a purpose in muscle building, but they often will reduce the body's inter-muscular coordination. A golf swing should be a fluid movement that integrates the muscles of the body like a well-tuned symphony. Exercises that are done standing, with free and full range of motion, will have the greatest carryover to the course.

Power + Endurance - A blend of short, intense sets of resistance training, along with complementary endurance work, will best accommodate the energy demands of the golfer.

Flexible, Stable, and Able

With respect to power and strength, a golfer would be incomplete without flexibility, balance, and coordination. Experts have analyzed the golf swings of today's professionals, and have made some interesting discoveries. Nick Price and Tiger Woods have been measured to have almost exactly the same club head speed and power at ball contact, yet Tiger consistently has the longer and more powerful total drive. Tiger's flexibility allows for a much greater follow through.

A comprehensive stretching program for the shoulders, hips, back, and thigh can encourage a complete swing, and minimize limitations in the body. This should be accompanied by deep tissue massage and chiropractic care for overworked and abused tissues.

Balance and coordination can be greatly enhanced by incorporating some non-traditional exercise approaches. A large exercise ball; also known as a Swiss or therapy ball, is a fantastic training tool. Doing common exercises standing on one leg or with eyes closed will also increase neuromuscular communication, creating a more stable golfer.

Conclusion

As you can see, golf conditioning is unique. Beware of gimmicky machines and gadgets that promise to enhance your game, and realize that it requires a full spectrum of training, stretching, and bodywork to create a fit golfer. A well-rounded conditioning program will lower your chance of injury, as well as your golf scores.

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