

Is Your Gym Program Destroying your Golf Swing?

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Introduction

Many golf professionals and golfers are now recognising the importance of getting fit for golf. However many golf professionals have a limited understanding or are confused in what they should be pursuing with regard to a strength and conditioning program specific to Golf.

In fact from my experience many golfers are unaware of the muscle groups they should be training to enhance golf performance and in the great majority are actually using the wrong muscle groups and poor technique within the gym environment.

These faults can not only cause injury but can also affect performance and result in destroying good swing bio-mechanics.

This article outlines common exercise regimes that golfers undertake and emphasizes common mistakes and important considerations. It should be emphasized that this article is not designed to discourage golfers from keeping fit.

On the contrary it is encouraging golf professionals to make themselves more aware of the mistakes that can be made when training in the gym and other exercise environments. It will sophisticate and maximise exercise technique that will in turn improve golf technique.

1st Common Golf Exercise Protocol: Warming up and Stretching

Golf Professionals should use the self-testing drills because:

1. The drills will improve posture therefore improve posture at address;
2. They will stretch the over tight muscles
3. They will strengthen the correct muscles for golf e.g. latissimus dorsi, gluteii, lower abdominals, rotator cuff etc
4. The golfer can measure his/her inflexibility and postural weaknesses using the distance of hands, neck, shoulders and back from the wall
5. Enables an increased body awareness as the drills require the participant to check legs, trunk and neck position in space

Crucifix Position: an example of self testing.

A great golf self testing exercise.

Standing with your head, back, legs and heels against a wall, place your arms in a crucifix position bending your elbows whilst trying to get your arms, wrists and back of the hands flat against the wall.

Try to keep your torso against the wall.

Hold for 10-15 seconds. IF you experience pain STOP.

This exercise is great for good posture at address

Common mistakes when stretching

- Poor positioning can cause injury eg back
 - Bouncing and fast jerky movements can also lead to injury.
 - Poor stabilising in the trunk region will lead to inefficient stretching of the muscle groups. This inefficiency will lead to the correct muscle groups not being warmed up properly and can result in weakness in these muscle groups inhibiting them from performing good swing bio-mechanics
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2nd Common Golf Exercise Protocol: Heavy Weights and Building Beach Muscles

Common Mistakes

Many golf professionals will realise not only from personal experience but also from teaching pupils who have excessive muscle bulk that excessive muscle hypertrophy can affect swing plane. Heavy resistance exercises can cause this not only resulting in restriction of movement in the golfer's body but also causing imbalances in muscles that have to be balanced for weight transference. It will also affect the "golfer's feel".

Generally speaking golfers should not commence a strength and conditioning program without being screened by a physical therapist, ensuring that they are able to maintain good posture and muscle balance.

3rd Common Golf Exercise Protocol: Running and aerobic work

Many golfers enjoy running and aerobic work and the general benefits to the golfer are:

- Running can be done without any equipment and can be done anywhere anytime
- It improves exercise tolerance on the golf course and in practice
- Strengthens the lower body

However please consider:

1. Golfers tend to move into a typical pattern associated with their golf practice eg stooping posture, feet turned out, pelvis tilting forward see below.
2. As golfers are in prolonged standing postures, running can increase the incidence of spinal, joint stress and fixed postures. Running can also jar the spine. Excessive running can cause tightness in the hamstrings and hip flexors affecting golf bio-mechanics.
3. Excessive running can cause foot problems - as golfers tend to have fallen arches (flat feet).

Recommendations:

- Specific stretching range should be implemented.
- Be aware of extra loading in the joints, especially the hips and spine.
- Good supportive shoes are imperative.
- Golfers should run for short distances with break-up stretching sessions
- Run with relaxed shoulders, pelvis tilted upward, feet pointing forwards, good controlled breathing and upright posture at all times. Stand tall at all times.

4th Common Golf Exercise Protocol: Cycling

The same benefits as running and aerobics but there is less impact on the joints.

Considerations:

- Many golfers will increase their pelvic tilt while cycling which can weaken abdominal muscles and excessively tighten their buttock muscles leading to poor posture and swing deviations
- Leaning over handlebars for long periods can cause stiffness in the upper spine and neck.
- Excessive cycling can tighten the hip flexors and muscles around the shoulder girdle that can affect rotation.
- Inner range exercises on a bicycle will reduce range of movement at the hip and knee joints as result of adaptive muscle shortening.

Recommendations:

- Adjust handlebars and seat to your correct height;
- Always stretch before and after cycling;
- Ensure that you stretch your spine and buttock muscles after cycling;
- Once you advance you can keep your arms to your side so that you are improving your balance, pelvis and trunk control while you are working your legs.

5th Common Golf Exercise Protocol: Swimming

Benefits of swimming:

- Increase exercise tolerance on the golf course and during practice
- It is low impact on joints as is not weight bearing
- It encourages good trunk rotation and shoulder girdle stability providing that you have good technique and that you use a variety of different strokes
- Resistance of the water can strengthen specific areas related to golf

Considerations:

- Front crawl and butterfly strokes can increase Pectoralis major tightness and therefore increase rounding of the shoulders and upper back (kyphosis).
- Fatigue can easily occur in water, resulting in compensating movements that cause poor muscle coordination.
- Do not swim immediately prior to golf as the overhead arm movements can affect your pattern of movement before you play

Recommendations:

- Break up swimming lengths with stretches.
- Alternate strokes e.g. back stroke and breaststroke.
- Be aware of fatigue and poor technique.

For more information on golf specific training contact

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