

# Golf Fitness Tip

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## ***How to begin a golf fitness program***

Golf fitness is the hot topic on the professional golf tours, at the collegiate golf level, at the country clubs, and everywhere in the golf industry. But many don't know what it means, what it should include or how to start a program.

Golf fitness means something different to everyone. It can mean anything from stretching before you play to a supervised and progressive daily program. For others it means it's the only way to play golf pain free, and of course there are those that think it is a big waste of time. Whatever your belief, the one thing that can't be denied is the great benefits of regular exercise!

The benefits of exercise are many and backed by much research. We know it can improve your general health and quality of life, but it can also give you greater pleasure and a competitive edge on the golf course. Improved posture (my favorite topic) and flexibility are necessary keys to developing a repeatable and effective swing. Strength, stability and balance are paramount in producing the power needed for out-driving your friends!

***However, the secret ingredient to an effective golf fitness program is your ability to take action, and be committed to working consistently on your program.*** It takes consistent action to make changes in your body. In some cases, you are making changes to muscles that have been lazy or dysfunctional as a result of many years of bad habits and programming.

Research specific to golf has been conducted over the past several years. One study conducted in 2004 looked at a group of male golfers and the effects of a conditioning program on drive distance. The study looked at their club head speed and driving distance before and after an 8 week training program. The training program consisted of strength training and plyometrics (explosive exercises) conducted 2 sessions per week. All subjects in the exercise group showed a significant increase in both club head speed and driving distance. The control group (non-exercise group) showed no significant improvements. *Effect of an 8-Week Combined Weights and Plyometrics Training Program on Golf Drive Performance; The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research: Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 59-62.*

## ***Consult with a fitness professional***

One concept to understand when considering a golf fitness program is the immense value of finding and working with a professional. Just like taking personal lessons from a PGA teaching professional, you will benefit from consulting with a fitness professional.

I will discuss the process of selecting a fitness professional in a minute, but I have to emphasize the fact that nothing is more beneficial than physically working with a professional that can watch your every move and assess your physical abilities. Our body, specifically the nervous system, and muscular system are great compensators which results in dysfunctional movement patterns. In other words, our body changes over time resulting in weakness, tightness and even pain. The result is difficulty moving into certain positions, such as those needed in a golf swing. A trained professional can recognize poor movement patterns, bad postural positions, and therefore make changes to your program and initiate corrective exercises.

All of the great sports coaches such as John Wooden, Vince Lombardi, and Casey Stengel, all focused on fundamentals when coaching their players. When training your body as we do with golfers it is no different. The PGA teaching professionals always spend time with fundamentals. When training the body to have better posture, improved flexibility, or a stronger core you need to focus on fundamentals. ***If your body's muscles do not function correctly from a fundamental perspective any advanced exercise will be a waste of time.***

OK now, when searching for a fitness professional, ideally try to find someone that has several years of experience working with golfers. Make sure they have adequate training. For example a licensed athletic trainer (ATC), a certified strength and conditioning specialist (CSCS) or a certified personal trainer (CPT), are credentials that make them qualified.

Ask questions regarding their golf experience. Do they play the game? Do they have relationships with teaching professionals? Do they understand the mechanics of the golf swing, as well as swing faults? Also, ask specific questions regarding their approach to fitness. Do they provide a physical assessment? Do they address the different components of fitness (see

below)? And, are they experienced in dealing with injuries or chronic problems?

You need to be able to trust your fitness professional, have confidence in their abilities and feel comfortable working with them. When you are satisfied with their answers to your questions, make a decision and go for it.

## **Components of a Golf Fitness Program**

**Posture**, I believe is one of the most overlooked areas when it comes to fitness training. An individual's posture tells a lot about how their body is working and what kind of restrictions there may be when trying to swing a golf club.

When discussing posture it is important to keep in mind that I am referring to more than just sitting up straight, or not having rounded shoulders. The entire body from head to toe was designed to be aligned in a precise manner. The body follows the principles of physics by the way the ends of the bones are shaped, how they connect to each other and how the muscle act upon the bones & joints They are subsequently designed to function and move in specific ways.

When out of alignment or out of muscular balance, your muscular function and movement patterns are limited. With the golf swing the most common postural problem that contributes to bad positions in the swing is the forward shoulders, forward head & rounded upper back. This slouched position makes it really difficult to get in a good set up position and significantly limits your shoulder turn or what we call thoracic rotation. The shoulder turn into the back swing is dependent upon a good position of the upper back at address. Tight muscles and restrictions in the upper spine prevent the golfer from maintaining good posture in the set up. Ultimately resulting in bad positions during the swing. The bottom line is you need to find a fitness professional that understands posture and its influence on movements specific to golf.

**Flexibility/Range of Motion** refers to the body's ability to move the bones and joints to the limits of its designed capacity. However it must be controlled motion, which I will discuss next.

An example of needed flexibility or range of motion is in the hip joint during the golf swing. As you stand in your golf position and swing there needs to be an optimal amount of rotation through both hips. During the backswing (right handed golfer) your right hip should internally rotate because your pelvis is rotating on top of it. If you have tightness in your hip muscles this motion will be limited. And, as we know, limited motion in one joint leads to compensated or excessive motion

somewhere else. Subsequently tightness in the right hip may result in locking of the right knee, a reverse pivot and excessive stress in the lower back during your backswing.

**Dynamic Stability** refers to the body's ability to stabilize joints or positions during movement. The one area that is most often discussed is core stability. This refers to your ability to stabilize or limit movement in the lumbar spine & pelvic region, an important component of your program.

**Dynamic Strength** essentially means the same as functional strength. Golf strength training should utilize all planes of motion the body moves in and somewhat golf specific. Isolated strengthening may be appropriate in certain situations but you should mostly strengthen in a dynamic way.

**Dynamic Balance** is closely related to posture because of the requirements of a balance between muscles and having them function correctly. Your golf professional will work with you in terms of weight shift, balance and the coordinated movements of the swing. The fitness professional may at times address this, but should not get carried away.

**Dynamic Power** is the actual power that is produced in the movement of the golf swing. One of the key aspects of this power is the good swing that is developed by working with a PGA teaching professional. Power can also be enhanced by first working on the above components and then adding some power exercises. However training power should be the last part of your golf fitness program. I see too many people start with the cool golf specific power exercises with no concern for the fundamentals I talked about earlier.

**Cardiovascular Endurance**, although not an obvious component for golf, it may be a factor in some cases. You should be able to walk a golf course (may be some exceptions) and generally be in some sort of cardiovascular condition.

To summarize, ensure your program focuses on fundamentals and includes all components of golf fitness. Remember don't do an exercise just because it looks cool or you were told it is good for your golf swing. Every exercise should have a purpose based on your individual needs. Good Luck!

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