

A Regular Exercise Program Can Help Lower Your Handicap

By Scott Laurent

Let's look at a few key areas of exercise and physical conditioning and see how it can apply to improving your golf game.

Flexibility

“Take that swing for example”- Well certainly you can agree that range of motion and flexibility might be a limiting factor as we continue to swing and carry that form throughout a long day of play. Your lack of flexibility and range of motion in areas such as lower and upper back muscles along with your hamstrings can be extremely limiting to your trunk rotation and hamper your score dramatically. Top players generally have between 40 and 50 degrees of pelvis rotation along with 90 to 95 degrees of shoulder turn or upper torso rotation. The difference between these two is known as the X-factor and is a major component of the power source in the modern swing.

Several easy assessments can provide insight to your current flexibility including that all too painful hamstring stretch as you try and touch your toes from a standing or seated position. Don't be surprised if you come up short by several inches. This is often one of the most overlooked areas of training for most golfers. Improved flexibility develops joint range of motion, which enhances balance, mobility, and coordination. By following just a few basic rules, you can improve your flexibility swiftly, and safely, providing a lot more stability and form during your golf swing.

You should select a variety of stretching exercises that involve all the major muscle groups. The most effective way to stretch, is to relax, and then move slowly, smoothly and gently to the point at which you feel mild tension. Do not bounce into the stretch, or push deep enough into the stretch to cause pain. Maintain the stretched position for 20 seconds or more, and then if you feel comfortable, you may move slightly deeper into the stretch. This form of stretching is called "Static Stretching". You should always do this when your muscles are warm and not cold, such as immediately following a walk or jog.

Muscle Strength and Endurance

Along with Flexibility and Range of Motion, there are other physical fitness activity components that will serve you well with your golf game. Lets take Muscular Strength and Muscular Endurance. What you experience when connecting with the ball for a long distance drive is a measure of your power output directly correlated to your Muscular Strength. Simply put, this absolute strength is measured as the amount of weight you could theoretically lift in one attempt or 1 Repetition Max (1RM). A simple weight training program using a % of your Repetition Max provides you with an opportunity for adaptive gains in strength allowing you to push the ball a little further, granted you are still concentrating on form and follow through.

Now let's follow that same stroke through that stronger drive and imagine that your "Muscular Endurance" is related to your "ability" to support that form throughout the 18 holes. In other words, your dynamic swing is being supported muscularly and skeletally with demands placed on the muscles to carry that weight through the stroke with minimal loss in form. This carrying of weight by your muscles eventually leads to fatigue and is a direct result of your muscular endurance. Your muscular endurance can be improved through weight bearing exercises that use lighter weights (lower % of your 1RM) but concentrate on increased repetitions say 12-20 times. This helps adapt the muscles to demands placed on it over a longer period of time, therefore helping to alleviate the tendency to feel fatigued as play continues throughout the day.

Muscle strength and endurance exercises should be combined for all the major muscle groups in the body. Your upper body along with your core, and your lower body should all be involved. Let's assume that we coordinate our golfing routine with a smart weight-training program. This might take shape in providing a well-rounded schedule 2-3 times per week and would combine muscular strength and muscular endurance exercises right where we need it! Core strengthening and functional weight training are now buzzwords for what is hot with "Golfers" to increase their performance.

Cardiovascular (Aerobic Fitness)-

The game of golf is not considered to be an aerobic exercise with much intensity, but truth be known, it does provide enough of a continued demand longer than most other forms of daily activity, especially if you are walking the course! Let's get back to that swing again and imagine that your ability to supply oxygen to your working muscles (cardiovascular fitness) is an important part of what is needed to continue that swing in proper power and form. In other words, the missing link in your muscular ability to hit that ball stronger (strength) and for a longer period of consistency (endurance) is that "gas" that your cardiovascular fitness provides. More and more research is also linking cardiovascular health to optimal cognitive functioning. With golf being the mind game that it is, this could help keep the edge on focusing!

The best way to achieve and sustain Cardiovascular Fitness is to engage in a rhythmic and dynamic form of activity that recruits large muscle groups like those in the

© Scott Laurent – scott@readytoexercise.com

Web: www.readytoexercise.com

legs and arms. Common types of aerobic exercise include: running, cycling, swimming and rowing. A typical Cardio program would combine these types of exercises with changes in Frequency, Intensity and Duration to provide optimal gains in efficiency with your heart and lungs.

Always remember to consult your physician before beginning any new exercise program. A trainer can also provide great insight to your current fitness by performing a baseline fitness test. This will help in designing a program that will effectively provide for good results in all these areas of physical activity. Go on and challenge yourself this year, you might just wind up enjoying a longer, healthier and more successful golf season than ever before!

Written by Scott Laurent

Scott has a BA in Psychology and Sport. He is a certified personal trainer and was a semi-pro athlete. His consulting business, www.readytoexercise.com , helps people who are contemplating, just starting, or having difficulty remaining in an exercise program. He can be reached at scott@readytoexercise.com