

Watch your Fitness- Don't take it too easy this off season!

By Scott Laurent

Wow what a great year it's been, wrapping up this year's golf season. Days and days of enjoyable golf with friends, family and even alone on occasion if you are like me. Now things start to wind down with the first frost behind us and anticipation of a few months of colder weather and lots of reflection. Reflection is good, as it provides us with an opportunity to take inventory of how we fared as a golfer this year, and what injuries, weaknesses, or triumphs we've experienced as well as our overall fitness. They say with age comes wisdom and there is no better opportunity than the present to review our strengths and limitations after another year while learning and executing plans for action for improvement this off season.

The off-season is very different in the type of fitness training that you should do to help with your golf game. A general conditioning plan is key right from the start identifying weaknesses including injuries and muscle imbalances along with any limited ranges of motion. The purpose of general conditioning is to establish a foundation of strength and dynamic muscle control, balance and awareness to help make the transition successful into the golf specific conditioning phase, which should take place 4-6 weeks prior to getting into the season again. Always keep from over strengthening areas of the body that can negatively impact your swing.

After that you can maintain your fitness in season with just a couple of moderate routines during the week (we will cover that more in the spring issue). For beginning exercisers always remember to start with an adaptation phase for both resistance training and aerobic cardio conditioning lasting 4-6 weeks. This helps your body develop the muscle balance, form, neuromuscular ability, and cardiovascular base for upcoming progressions and increases in intensity, frequency and duration.

This off season, let's take a hard look at several key areas of fitness and what we should do to help prepare for what could be the best season yet to come. Listed below are some simple Do's and Don't tips for several areas of fitness to concentrate on this off-season.

Resistance Weight Training-

Do start the adaptation phase of weight training by performing exercise repetitions in the 12-15 Rep range with 1-2 sets each. Use a lighter weight during this phase concentrating on good form and breathing.

Don't use functional training cable machines or balance training discs with weight training too early in the training phase, you can add this type of training as your balance improves using dumbbells to start with.

Do allow yourself 24-48 hours between resistance training sessions allowing your muscles to recover. Delayed onset muscle soreness might have you feeling stiff for a few days longer. Make sure it's your muscles that are sore and not your joints and ligaments,

which would mean you're lifting too much weight or not using proper form. A trainer can be helpful here.

Don't start your lifting routine with smaller muscle groups. Concentrate on the major muscles (back, shoulders, chest, quads, glutes) and work towards the smaller muscle groups later in the session (biceps, triceps, forearms, hamstrings, calf, etc).

Flexibility and Range of Motion

Do assess your current flexibility including your hamstrings, lower back, hip, shoulder and torso rotation. This will help identify areas needing attention and provides a baseline for future assessments. Use a trainer if needed.

Don't bounce during stretching, instead move slowly, smoothly and gently to the point where you feel mild discomfort. Hold the stretch for 15-20 seconds and if you feel comfortable, you can move slightly deeper into the stretch.

Do use dynamic based stretching exercises (movement based such as arms swings) prior to exercising and use static stretching more often after the workout when the muscles can be lengthened properly since they are warm.

Don't forget that as we get older our flexibility naturally decreases due to a loss of elasticity in the ligaments and tendons. A year round flexibility routine can slow and counter this effect.

Nutrition and Weight Control

Do calculate your estimated caloric needs to help structure a good sound eating routine that helps maintain a health weight. Caloric estimate help can be found at www.mypyramid.gov.

Don't rely on calorie counting alone for helping lose or maintaining a healthy weight. A good resistance-training program should be used to help spare losing lean muscle tissue and raising metabolism. A moderate dose of aerobic activity also can help, concentrate on low to medium intensity longer duration exercises such as cycling and walking for example.

Do learn how to read food labels and nutritional guidelines paying attention to important areas such as calories per serving and the percent daily values of fats, saturated fats, cholesterol and sodium content.

Don't make the mistake of choosing empty calorie foods, which contain a high amount of calories with little or no nutritional value. Examples of this are sodas, sweetened drinks, cakes, cookies, etc.

Cardiovascular Training

Do test your current level of aerobic fitness, which can be administered by your physician or a personal trainer. Some treadmills also come with a self-administered fitness test. This will help define what levels of training intensity and heart rate will be adequate to promote better cardio vascular conditioning.

Don't overdue training with bouts of high intensity training at first. Concentrate on building a base of approximately 4-6 weeks. You can start with several days a week

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for approximately 15-20 minutes at a time and modestly increase the intensity frequency and duration, as you get closer to the 5th and 6th week.

Do purchase a heart rate monitor and familiarize yourself with the different heart rate training zones. Research info on Fat burning zones/Aerobic zones/Anaerobic zones. Also learn how to determine your personal maximum heart rate with the simple calculation of $220 - \text{your age} = \text{MHR}$. Training intensities will be performed at a % of this MHR number.

Don't become too attached to one form of aerobic exercise, such as using only a bike or a treadmill. Mix it up by cross training i.e. using an elliptical, stair climber, rowing, swimming, etc. Your body will respond more favorably with quicker gains when using several different modes challenging the heart and lungs in new ways.

Most importantly **Do** consult your physician before starting a new exercise program.

Look for upcoming information on early season training guidelines that will be more golf specific. Good luck this coming off-season with your new commitment to getting your fitness primed for next year!

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