

Golf Fitness, Training for the Game of Life

By: Patricia Tremblay, BS, NSCA-CPT
Original Publish date: June 2007



Golf is one of the most popular sports played in America today, yet it has not been thought of as a sport that requires conditioning. Worldwide there are 57 million people playing golf, with over 26.2 million of those people living in the United States according to the National Golf Foundation. At least 12 % of the population plays golf at least once a year, with approximately 586 rounds of golf played. There are approximately 13,000 public golf courses in the United States with Florida leading the way with 1,073 golf courses. The average 18 hole score is around 100, while only 6% of men and 1% of women break 80 regularly. Golf is a game to be enjoyed and simultaneously hated by many, and a passion for most that play the game. The average scores have changed very little over the years, even with all the new technology. Why is it then that some golfers are able to improve their game consistently, while others are forced to the sidelines by injury? The answer lies in their level of fitness. Today, the top professional golfers such as Vijay Singh, Tiger Woods and Annika Sorenstam all have personal trainers for this very reason. I think it is an interesting fact that pound for pound, Tiger Woods was the strongest athlete at Stanford!

Golf is more than just a game it is a sport and to be at the top of your game requires some conditioning. Peak muscle use during a golf swing in amateurs (90%) is higher when compared to a professional golfer (80%). The stronger, more flexible and overall fitter an individual is, the more likely they are going to play a more consistently perfect game. Golf performance requires several aspects of fitness such as strength, flexibility, cardio and most importantly core conditioning. Approximately 62% of amateur golfers will injure themselves as a direct result of playing golf. Amateur golfers identified lower back dysfunction (24%) as their most common golf-related problem. Injuries to amateurs are most likely caused by over use (25%), striking the ground with club (hitting fat 21%), and poor swing mechanics (19%). For those golfers reading this article I detect a sly grin and nodding chin! Increased spinal loading is often attributed to poor swing mechanics

and attempting to swing harder (to compensate for the lack of a more skilled swing) in an attempt to hit the ball far. The spine undergoes a compressive load about 8 times a person's body weight during the golf swing in both populations Ouch! At this point the golfer stands up, places his hands on his back...grimaces and says something creative like "Ohhh my aching back, its hard to get old" (It's not the hot dogs, beer and sedentary lifestyle). The definition of an efficient swing is: A swing that repeatedly and optimally creates maximum force while maintaining its technical integrity and minimizing the risk of injury. Nearly 70% of injuries are caused by repetitive practice swings, which mean they must not be very efficient! Hmmmm....could this be due to lack of overall fitness, lack of skill or a nice combo of both. I'll have the number three combo...low fitness level and lack of skill please, and could I have a side of back pain please? You're out of back pain okay I'll substitute shoulder dysfunction instead.

The cold hard facts are that many golfers spend a large amount of their day sitting. This may be due their job or an addiction to the CNN channel. Sitting causes a host of ills, but primarily causes our body to shut down its postural system. This particular weakness of the core results in golf swing faults such as "Early extension" and "Coming Over-The-Top". I have found golfers to be a unique breed of athlete. For one, they don't think of themselves as an athlete, which in turns means they don't consider fitness as something that may improve their game. They will however buy new clubs, better golf balls and any other gadget that may improve their game. The largest golf market in the world is the United States and we will buy anything that could potentially improve our score. You could sit and watch the Golf Channel all week, but if are not incorporating fitness into your life then not only will your golf game suffer but so will your bodies functional ability to manage movement in the game of life.

So, lets get to the bread and butter of this article (whole grain and organic of course). What can golf fitness do for you and how do you access it? Golf fitness is really no different than a general fitness program, except it concentrates on particular movements that are primary in an efficient golf swing. One method we use to determine the bodies particular movement inefficiencies is the use of the "Functional Movement Screen". The Functional Movement Screen includes seven tests that assess mobility and stability. Each screen demonstrates the quality of movement an athlete (yes, that's you the golfer!) possesses to build all other athletic ability and skill. This is not a test to measure fitness, it is a method to determine specific asymmetries within the body that could potentially lead to an inability to improve skill and as well as reduce the potential for injury. There are specific corrective exercises that correlate with the screen and these exercises are designed to regain symmetry and efficiency of movement. For the golfer this means correcting things such as early extension and the dreaded Hosel Shot. (For the non-golfer a Hosel Shot is what happens when the hips move to close to the ball, the hands and club approach the ball with too much extension that causes the ball strike closer to the heel (hosel) of the club) From what I understand "Shank" is a very bad word and even saying the word out loud could destroy the entire game of one golfer. Primary to success in golf is the development of a sound Core, all movement is initiated through the core and thus if this area of the body is functionally fit your chances at reducing injury and improving your game increase 10 fold. One major component of golf is rotation around the core.

Many golfers lack the ability to distinguish from where their hips begin and their torso ends. If your hips and shoulders are tight, you increase the chance of incorrect sequencing throughout the back, which of course causes that nagging low back pain. Many people do not get hurt playing golf it is merely a result of an inability to rotate the body correctly around the core. Development of this neuromuscular connection will not only improve your golf game, but is sure to reduce back pain as well as your golf score.

One of the best resources for Golf fitness (other than me of course!) is a web site sponsored by Titleist. The Titleist Performance Institute (www.MyTPI.com) was designed as a resource for golfers who wish to improve both their level of fitness and their game. There are articles and video clips of exercises designed with the golfer in mind. The wisest method to improve both your fitness and skill level with golf is to enlist a golf professional to analyze your swing and a fitness professional to help you design a fitness program that supports your specific needs and limitations. Consider Golf more than just a game, consider it a sport. Then consider that all athletes have to perform some level of conditioning to maintain their ability to play the game pain free as well as to enhance their abilities on the field. Finally, if you are a golfer consider yourself an athlete. You may not be Tiger Woods (and as of 2011 aren't you GLAD not to be!) or Annika Sorenstam, but I doubt if you approach the game with any less enthusiasm and determination minus the fat paycheck!



Patricia Tremblay, B.S. and is a NSCA certified personal trainer and owns Physiques By PT, a personal training and consulting company specializing in on site fitness programs.

For more information on Golf Fitness, please contact Patricia Tremblay, NSCA-CPT. Patricia offers a Golf Fitness program and provides the Functional Movement Screen.