

Swinging into the Golf Season

It might be below zero but January is over and it won't be long before golf season is here. Whether you're a seasoned pro, an avid amateur or beginner getting your body in shape is important. Muscle injuries are common in the sport and the proper conditioning will definitely improve your score. Did you know Tiger Woods works out before every tournament?

In order to get your body ready there are three major components, muscular conditioning, cardiovascular conditioning and flexibility. There is no need to spend hours in the gym. A few minutes, 3-4 times a week, and you will see the improvement in your score and body.

A study, done in a 2001 issue of British Journal of Sports Medicine, found that just 53.4% of the golfers do not warm up properly except for a few air swings. Less than 10% did any stretching, and none did any aerobic activity. Andrea Fradkin, author of the study, reports, "There are two major negative effects of not warming up before playing 18 holes. The first is that you are at an increased risk of injury, and the second is a decreased level of performance." The result is cold muscles prone to injuries and higher scores. An ideal warm-up for amateur golfers should last 10-15 minutes. "It should consist of a period of aerobic exercise to increase the temperature of the body [and] should be followed by stretching of the sport-specific muscles that are to be used in the subsequent performance."

Muscular conditioning: Increased muscular strength is essential to a good golf swing. It enables you to increase club speed and hit the ball further. Another benefit of strength training is an increase in lean body mass resulting in decreased body fat, improving blood circulation and cholesterol. Below are a list of exercises which, performed three times a week, 8-12 repetitions per session, can help achieve these goals.

- Abdominal crunches
- Pushups
- Tricep dips
- Bicep curls
- Lat pulldown
- Squats or lunges
- Trunk rotation with a pulley or a bar on the shoulders
- Lateral flexion/rotation holding a lightweight or cable pulley
- Back Extensions
- Overhead shoulder press

Cardiovascular conditioning: Doing aerobic activity 3-4 times a week for 20-30 minutes will increase your energy levels thereby making it easier to finish all 18 holes.

Flexibility: The final component is flexibility. Stretching your back, legs, shoulders and chest muscles everyday for a few minutes will help you have a smoother swing and increase your range of motion decreasing the risk of muscle injury.

So get out there, hit the gym, visit the driving range and practice!