

## Gear up for Golf Season

By Kent Pegg

Golf is one of the most popular and growing sports in the world today. It is also, as anyone who has played can tell you, one of the most frustrating sports.

Billions of dollars are spent each year by golfers trying to improve their game. Better clubs, private lessons and more equipment are all ways we try to drop our handicap.

Instead of spending more dollars, why not try better strength and conditioning to enhance your game? A little work at the gym or at home can go a long way to producing longer drives and lower scores.

As with most exercise programs, golf conditioning should include three components focusing on strength and power, flexibility, and cardiovascular endurance.

Increasing your strength has been shown to be one of the better ways to lower your handicap. Strength increases can lead to an increase in club head speed of up to five to ten miles per hour.

Since golf is a rotary activity, include exercises emphasizing the rotation of the trunk of the body. Torso twists can be performed either without weights or with resistance provided by cable pulleys with the grips adjusted to pull from a height of mid torso level.

Core strength is also critical to your golf game. Perform crunches for abdominal strength and side crunches for oblique strength. Concentrate on high volume and frequent training for these areas rather than heavy weights and less frequent workouts.

Most importantly, don't forget your lower back. Lower back strength is critical to avoiding injury and increasing your power.

Perform "good morning" exercises with free weights or back hyperextensions to strengthen your lower back. However, take caution *not* to use a horizontal back hyperextension bench. I've seen these inferior quality, lower price benches do more harm than good, injuring more people than they've helped. Use only a 45-degree back hyperextension bench to avoid overextending and causing injury.

Hip and leg strength are also important. Perform compound exercises like squats and lunges, as well as isolation exercises like leg extensions and leg curls to increase your lower body strength.

Finally, make sure that every body part gets worked out at least once per week to ensure overall conditioning and body symmetry.

When performing your strength workouts remember that the harder you work in the gym, the greater the benefit on the golf course. Use this as a motivating factor to fuel your workouts.

In addition to strength, emphasize your flexibility training to improve your golf game. Most golfers, especially men, can significantly improve their game through stretching classes or yoga classes.

An increase in flexibility leads to a greater range of motion that allows for a longer, more comfortable swing. This, in turn, generates more power. Flexibility exercises should be performed frequently, every day if possible.

To get the most out of your flexibility program focus on stretches for the shoulders, trunk, lower back, and hamstrings.

Also, try to stretch *after* your workouts. When the muscles are warmed up and have good blood flow, the stretch will provide a better permanent elongation of the muscles and the tendons. This “plastic” stretch will help you achieve a greater, lasting, range of motion increase and, in addition, help you avoid injury.

Finally, to keep your energy up and your stress down, work to increase your cardiovascular endurance. The better you feel and the more energy you have, the better your scores on those hot days on the back nine.

To increase your cardiovascular endurance, get your heart rate up for at least twenty minutes, three to four times per week. This is best done by training on a treadmill, recumbent bike, stair stepper or elliptical trainer.

If you increase your strength, your flexibility, and your endurance, you’ll improve your golf game as well. A little effort off the course will lower your handicap and give you the competitive edge you’ve been seeking.

Kent Pegg is a certified personal trainer and the co-owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center. If you have any questions about the exercises in this article you can call him at 662-5232.