



FIT FOR GOLF

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AEROBIC FITNESS = BETTER SCORING

Surely you don't need to be 'fit' for golf? Your heart rate doesn't even come close to maximal levels! You walk a little, stop and hit a ball with varying degrees of power about 70 to 120 times, depending on your ability.

However, if you delve deeper, as we will in this article, you will soon realise the importance of cardio-respiratory fitness for golf. The world's best players know how important it is, so why not follow their lead?

In this article I will show you why cardio-respiratory fitness is important for golf and evaluate the suitability of some common forms of aerobic exercise for your golf conditioning program.

LOSE SOME WEIGHT

Research and anecdotal evidence suggest that improving your cardio-respiratory fitness can help reduce your weight (body fat).

Less weight, particularly around your middle, can have important implications for your swing. Depending on the size of your chest and belly (and statistics tell us they are getting bigger), body fat can get in the way of your hip and shoulder rotation and therefore alter your swing mechanics.

Not only that, carrying excess weight (particularly around your abdomen) places unwanted added stress on your lower back, hips, knees and ankles.

INCREASE ENERGY, MAINTAIN FOCUS

Most golf courses will have some hills or undulations of varying size. Walking up these hills while pulling a 10 to 20kg bag and buggy combination can be quite a challenge, depending on your fitness level.

For example, your ball is halfway up or on top of a hill and by the time you get to your ball your pulse and breathing rate are quite high. If you are fit, your pulse and breathing rate will quickly drop to near normal levels and you can play your shot without a problem.

But what if your fitness is poor, and your pulse and breathing rate don't fully recover prior to playing your next shot? Is the shot affected by a higher-than-normal pulse and rapid breathing?

Try it. Next time you are at the range, elevate your heart rate and breathing rate by doing some exercises, jogging or brisk walking and go straight into striking some balls. Were your shots affected negatively? I would think so.

Perhaps with improved fitness (and less weight to lug around) you could conserve more energy too.

Do you fatigue toward the end of a round, and if so, what impact does this have on your scores? Many golfers get tired as the round progresses; they lose length off the tee, struggle to maintain good posture through their swing and lose concentration.

Fitter people feel more energetic, their muscles don't tire as

Nick Faldo undergoes some cardio training as part of European Ryder Cup team preparations.



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES X 2



Backstroke is more beneficial for golfers who choose to swim to better their fitness.

quickly and they can remain focused for longer periods. Do you hit more fairways/greens and make fewer putts on the back nine? Maybe a lack of energy or fatigue late in the round is costing you strokes.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE

When you are fit you feel good.

Typically, when you carry less dead weight (fat), daily tasks are easier as your work capacity is greater and you have more energy. You feel satisfied you are doing your best to maintain good physical condition.

What does this do for your psyche? If you are competing against an opponent in match play, who is carrying considerably more weight than you (therefore you could assume you are in better condition), could this give you a psychological edge over your opponent? It would be hard to argue otherwise.

Improving your fitness can also result in better respiratory control. This can help during high pressure moments when your nerves threaten to strangle you. Deep, controlled breathing is calming and can help focus your mind.

WHAT TYPE OF TRAINING?

JOGGING OR TREADMILL

When it comes to weight loss, it is hard to go past this form of exercise. The impact forces that radiate through your body tend to stimulate a lot of muscular activation and energy expenditure.

However, if you have any problems with joint pain (e.g. osteoarthritis) or lower back discomfort, jogging may not be your best option. Softer surfaces, good quality, fitted running shoes and reducing the intensity of your jog to a brisk walk can certainly help, as can reducing the duration of the session. Instead of doing 30 minutes continuously, you might do 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the afternoon.

If you jog regularly, poor jogging posture can exaggerate poor life posture. This will make it hard for you to achieve a good set-up position in golf, so keep your chest up, your head over your shoulders and your stomach softly drawn in when jogging.

SWIMMING

Excessive freestyle, butterfly and breaststroke tend to over-work the muscles of the chest and front of the shoulders, which have important implications for posture, namely rounded shoulders. ♦

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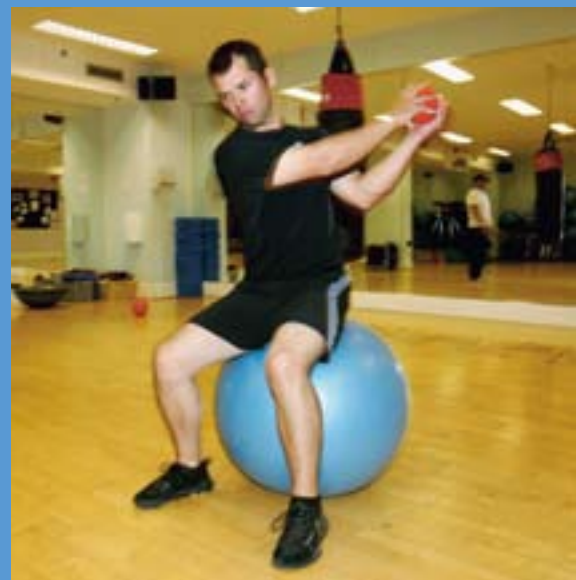
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Plenty of variety is the key to doing circuit training that will increase your fitness level. Touring pro Paul Casey has exercises tailored to his body's needs.

Rounded shoulders can be trouble in the golf swing, leading to a number of common 'swing faults', like poor shoulder rotation and coming 'over the top'.

Strokes on your back are better, namely backstroke and 'back sculling'. These work your back muscles more and won't have the same negative postural influence the other strokes may have. Swimming is not great for weight loss, but can help with respiratory control for conditions like asthma, as well as being very beneficial for people with back and joint pain.

ROWING ERGOMETER

This intense form of exercise is fantastic for fast fitness improvements and fat burning. Your legs, core, back and arms all get worked hard and given the lack of impact, rowing is easy on the joints.

Provided you hold good posture throughout the movement, this can be a very good choice for golfers, given the leg, back and shoulder girdle stability/strength required.

Special note: If you suffer from a bulging disc(s) the rower is best avoided.

CYCLING

This is another non-impact form of exercise. Cycling is great for lower body and buttock strength. There are a couple of considerations here, one being the stooped-over posture you often see cyclists adopt, either because they lack awareness, as they fatigue or to streamline their bodies. Enforcing this posture is not good for golf, so when you are cycling ensure your back is flat and your head is over your shoulders. Stretching your calves and hamstrings is also very important if you choose to do a lot of cycling.

CIRCUIT TRAINING

Circuit training can be used as an alternative to the more traditional forms of cardio training. Set up a series of three or more exercises and work to either time (30-60 seconds) or repetitions (10-30) per exercise. If you keep your recovery between exercises to a minimum, your heart rate and breathing will climb quickly.

If your beginning fitness level is low, gradually decrease your recovery time between exercises. Tailor the circuit exercises to suit your needs and you can improve your cardio-respiratory fitness, strength and your golf motor patterns at the same time.

Variety is the key to maintaining interest in your exercise regime. There are a number of ways you can vary your routine to keep your motivation levels high. Get into the outdoors! Run along a beach or

through a park, or ride a bike through the bush or along a scenic road.

Forgetting golf for one moment, the benefits of aerobic exercise for general health and well being are well researched and conclusive: increased longevity and improved quality of life.

If you analyse the demands of golf, you may question the importance of fitness to enhance your performance, but in this article we have set the record straight. You can lose weight, reduce back/joint pain, increase your energy levels, concentrate harder and gain a psychological edge over some of your opponents, which could mean the difference between winning and losing. Get fit for golf and watch your game improve.

Note: Before commencing any conditioning program it is recommended you consult a Medical or Allied Health Professional. 🏠

Trent Malcolm is an accredited Exercise Physiologist, specialising in golf-specific strength and conditioning. For more information, contact Trent on 0409 384 522, tmalcolm@optusnet.com.au or The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448.

➤➤ NEXT MONTH:

We will focus on gym programs and how common exercises may be messing with your golf swing.

To keep your motivation levels high, train in scenic locations.

