



DANGEROUSLY STRONG!

In previous articles I have spoken about the importance of strength and conditioning for golf and offered a whole host of different examples of how exercises can improve your game.

Golf-specific strength, fitness, balance, flexibility and power have all been discussed in detail. Whilst on the one hand, there are seemingly infinite ways of improving your body for golf, on the other hand there are infinite ways you can damage your body for golf.

It is incredible the number of people you see in a gym with poorly designed programs, working out with horrendous technique. In this article, we will discuss some common 'mistakes' I see in the gym and highlight exercises that may be doing you (and your game) more harm than good!

CRUNCHES PROMOTE C-POSTURE

Traditional sit-ups and various forms of stomach crunches are common exercises that many people perform as part of their exercise regime. Why?

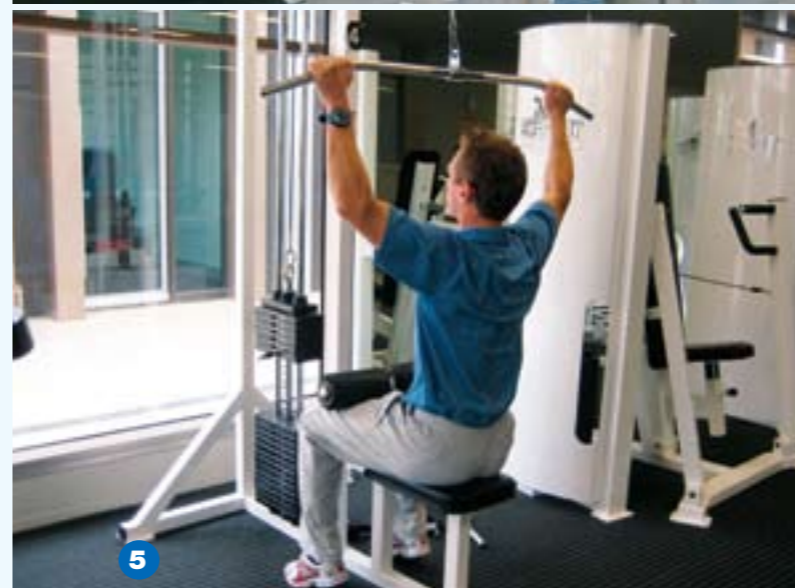
Most people are of the mistaken belief that this will help 'blast the fat off their stomach and lead to an attractive six pack' (if you listen to the infomercials); but this does not work.

Whilst you will build strength of the so-called six pack muscles, the exercise itself will have no impact on the fat that overlays the muscle.

"How do I get the fat off my stomach then?" I hear you ask. The key really is to eat and drink fewer calories and burn up more stored energy through whole body exercises.

This isn't the only issue with doing loads of sit-ups and crunches. As far as golf is concerned, it can lead to bad posture making it difficult to get into a good set-up position. Doing sit-ups (pic 1) and crunches (pic 2) involve flexion of the trunk, a rounding of the middle back and a 'poking chin'.

If these exercises are not balanced with at least equal repetitions on the opposing muscle group (the back extensors) the net affect over time will be a rounded back posture, with 'poking chin', and a golf set up that is hunched over the ball.



This posture is far from ideal and places increased stress on your back and neck, as well as making rotation difficult to achieve in your swing.

BENCH PRESS FOR ROUNDED SHOULDERS

I often see people spending whole sessions in the gym doing exercises on their chest to bulk up (pic 3), with as many as five or more isolation exercises on their chest alone. An over-emphasis on building up the size of the chest without doing (at least) equivalent repetitions on the opposing back muscles, can lead to a rounding of the shoulders and subsequent joint/muscular dysfunction. For golf, this is the last thing you want, as there are a number of swing compensations that may result.

ARM CURLS WON'T BOOST POWER

There is a (mistaken) belief that an emphasis on isolation exercises like 'bicep curls' will lead to a more powerful swing. If you go into just about any gym in Australia you will see people doing all kinds of variations

of arm curls (pic 4). True power in a golf swing will come through efficient swing mechanics, as well as a combination of flexibility and strength of the legs, core and upper body.

BEND AND EXTEND

A teenage boy came to see me several months ago to tweak his program for golf. When he demonstrated his gym routine I wasn't surprised that he struggled to straighten out his arms, his head was well forward of his rounded shoulders and his middle back was beginning to round excessively.

He had a typical young guy's frame with the mentality "I want to get big!" He was training in true body building fashion, developing non-functional, disproportionate muscle bulk that can impair posture and joint range of motion.

Not only was he doing all of the previously mentioned things, like too many crunches, chest and arm curl exercises, but he was also working only partial ranges of motion. That is, he would not fully straighten his arms at end of each repetition (pic 5).

It is only after re-education, and many months of hard work on his new program, that he is starting to improve his posture and regain his elbow/shoulder range of motion. In his golf swing, he is now extending his arms fully through impact and his rotation is improving, a likely result of more stretching and improved posture. His length off the tee will likely improve in line with these things as well.

GET OFF THE MACHINES

Machine-based exercises have their place, particularly for people new to the gym. They are simple to use, requiring very little instruction and are generally safe, giving inexperienced people confidence. But how functional are they for golf?

Most of these types of machines will have your trunk supported and/or your arms/legs in a fixed position (pic 6), working your muscles in a very restrictive range. This will typically disengage your trunk muscles (core), minimise the need for joint stabilisation and eliminate any balance component; three key criteria for improving your body for golf.



BE POSTURE AWARE WHEN EXERCISING

In virtually all exercises good posture should be emphasised. Whether using a treadmill, a rowing ergometer, an exercise bike or any other type of exercise, good postural awareness will likely carry over from the gym to the golf course.

Here you can see two examples of poor posture (pics 7 & 8), while the pull down bar (pic 9) demonstrates an exercise that is clearly not good for your neck. The main concerns include hyperextension of the neck ('poking chin') and a rounded back.

Over time, if repeated enough, and without daily postural awareness, you may be condemned to bad posture and potential problems with your back and neck.

CONCLUSION

If you are committed to a gym routine that is a great start! However, if you want to improve your body for golf (and life) I suggest you review your program and ensure it is well balanced. Back off on the crunches, work your back muscles at least as much as your chest, cut out some arm curls, get off those machines and pay attention to your posture. And of course, stretch!

Make sure your gym program is NOT doing you more harm than good.

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

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