



Our fitness expert Andy Vince, former National Coach for the Scottish Athletics Federation, has been to a number of major games, including Commonwealth, European and World championships. He was educated in America while completing a 4-year sports scholarship, graduating with a BSc in Physical Education and a MSc in Biomechanics of Human Movement. As an athlete, he gained a number of British vests for his country competing in the shot-put event. Over the years Andy has worked with a number of individuals in different sports, primarily in the area of improving strength and conditioning, the most recent notable success being Scottish European 200 metre champion, Doug Walker. Andy can be contacted for professional advice at: avince@aol.com

Get in touch with your golfing muscles

Are you realising your full golfing potential? A sound technique alone may not be sufficient. Next time you're out on the course, take a little time out to consider how your body feels and reacts to your golfing actions: strained? over stretched? Well, your muscles play a key part in the game of golf and they need to be exercised regularly. By following a simple exercise routine you will soon notice that you can hit the ball further and more accurately without over hitting or straining during the execution of the shot. Having strong, well-toned muscles will give you a smooth swing, and fewer aches and pains after a strenuous round.

Core body strength

The torso, particularly the muscles that connect the hips to the lower back and stomach, are especially important in maintaining a strong posture while hitting a ball. The foundation of all good controlled movement is balance and stability, and by conditioning the mid-region of the body you should also be able to reduce injury.

Strong hands, arms and legs

The extra strength gained in building the upper limbs will give you greater club head speed, and more control and energy throughout the stroke. The other benefits derived will enable you to offer a greater selection of shots, many of which will make even difficult situations seem less daunting, thus producing a lower number of 'disastrous' holes.

Getting started

The first step in adopting a systematic approach to a regular fitness routine is to visit your local doctor for a check-up making it safe for you to begin a progressive, light to moderate exercise programme.

Building foundation

An effective exercise programme will include general and specific golf-related exercises. The general exercises are intended to give you a 'baseline fitness' on which to build and develop a golfing bias that can translate into your game.

General conditioning

Jogging

This form of exercise will build a stronger heart and lungs, and give extra performance in the legs. If you have trouble with knee or hip joints, a bicycle or exercise bicycle may well offer a less abrasive method of achieving this aim. Don't overdo it too early. Start jogging for 5 minutes and then gradually build it up over a period of a couple of weeks to 20 minutes at a time. Ensure that you have comfortable shoes that are able to absorb shock from the road or, better still, jog on firm grassland if possible. If you experience soreness in the joints then, as mentioned above, the exercise bicycle may be the more suitable option.

Sit ups

Sit ups strengthen the stomach muscles and give stability during the swing and striking of the ball. Start with 10 repetitions, progressing to 20 minutes; repeat 3 times (sets) with 5 minute rests between sets. Lie on your back with your knees bent together and your feet flat on the floor. Place both hands on your thighs and slowly sit up moving your finger tips only as far as your knees. If your neck is hurting and feeling strained, then you are doing it incorrectly; instead, focus on crunching up your stomach. You should be lifting your back off the floor by only 2 or 3 inches. Return slowly to the lying position.

Press ups

This exercise is necessary to build up strength in the arms and shoulders. If you are unable to execute a press up in the traditional 'hands-feet' fashion, then use the adapted version of bending your knees to begin with and then build up to the traditional pose. Lying face down, start with your hands at shoulder width. Attempt 5 repetitions, building up gradually to 10 repetitions - 3 sets with 5 minute rests between sets. Keep your eyes focused on the floor and your back straight and static.

Standing squats

This exercise builds up muscles in the legs and buttocks and gives extra stability and strength in the lower back. The placing of the feet in the normal golfing stance will ensure that you

This issue's exercise tip

Your breathing dictates the rhythm, speed, intensity and amount of control you have over an exercise. When starting any exercise, breathe in slowly as you prepare (e.g. when lowering as with a squat or in the back swing of a golf swing), and then exhale forcefully during the execution of the exercise or shot.

also get a 'positive' transfer of the movement potential into the golf stroke proper. Again, start with 10 repetitions - 3 sets with 5 minute rests between sets. Stand upright with the feet placed a little wider than your normal driving position. Begin by bending at the knees, as if you were lowering yourself to sit on a chair. Ensure that your back remains straight and the eyes focused forward with your chin up. Only lower yourself to what would be a sitting position and no further. Hold this position for a count of three, and then return to an upright position.

The secret to any successful fitness programme is consistency. The great thing about these exercises is that they can be done in the privacy of your own home, quickly and with no expense. Of course, if you want to improve your fitness even further then visit a local gym or leisure complex. Qualified gym staff can provide more detailed fitness advice specifically for your needs and show you how to use the specialised gym equipment. Improvements do not come immediately; however, over time, permanent, observable differences will become apparent which will be measured in your golfing game.

Remember, as described in the first article in this fitness series, you must stretch before you exercise. The body works more efficiently after blood is pumped into your muscles, tendons and ligaments, creating and a lubricating effect on the moving parts. Try a 10 second hold after reaching the end position of any stretch and do not jerk the movement (RELAX DON'T STRAIN), improvement will come, be patient!

The next article in the series will focus entirely on exercises that directly affect your game. Often the problem with a player's swing is not a technical fault but an inability to execute a movement because of a lack of strength or mobility, or, in the latter stages of a round, fatigue.

For further professional advice on improving your fitness levels and golfing game, please contact me at: avince@aol.com. ■
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