

## Golf Strength and Conditioning:

# What it means for the recreational golfer.

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As a Golf Strength and Conditioning specialist, I often speak to parents and people within the golf industry around what my function is at the HPC, and exactly how TPI works and the application to golf. Inevitably, the discussion will revert back to the parents' own golf game, and their state of physical fitness (or lack thereof) and how they know it affects their golf. The concerns around golf include consistency, back pain, low energy levels and golf performance. At some point, the parent or golfer will ask whether I would be able to help them. This question leads me to believe that perhaps there is a mindset or a pre-conceived idea that Strength and Conditioning for golf is limited to elite golfers and cannot be applied to recreational golfers. I trust that after reading this article, that mindset will change and we will see the recreational golfer embrace golf fitness.

It is interesting how prevalent injuries are in the recreational golfer, and oftentimes these recreational golfers have been to an injury specialist, whether it be a chiropractor, physiotherapist or fitness trainer, but have not seen their return to golf producing the fruit that they were hoping for. There are three main questions I would like to answer:

1. Why is there a high prevalence of injuries within recreational golf?
2. What are some of the challenges facing recreational golfers and golf improvement?
3. How can strength and conditioning for elite golf also be applied to recreational golf?

### Why is there a high prevalence of injuries within recreational golf?

Recreational golfers play golf for fun, for enjoyment and in their discretionary time. They are not in the fortunate position where golf provides a stable income from which they can live. These recreational golfers are managers, accountants, IT specialists, doctors and teachers during office hours and aspiring professional golfers on the weekend. The majority of their time is spent in an office, behind a computer or standing for many hours a day, often extending to 50-60 hours a week. These golfers then bring their physical limitations to their golf swing on a Saturday morning club competition, and wonder why their golf is inconsistent.

The common physical limitations are all related to mobility issues. Flexibility or a lack of flexibility restricts the person's ability to move freely which creates unnecessary overloading of the body. These mobility issues not only create inconsistent golf mechanics, but dramatically increase the chance of injury too.

Back pain is the most prevalent golf-related injury in amateur golf with over 55% of amateur golfers experiencing back pain ([www.mytpi.com](http://www.mytpi.com)), and we have seen that a lack of rotational mobility has a very strong influence on the health of the spine. Rotation in golf is sourced from the hips, more specifically internal (inward) and external (outward) rotation of the femur (upper thigh), as well as the thoracic spine (the area of the back between the neck and lower back).

If we assess the typical desk-bound corporate professional, we tend to find a very kyphotic (round backed, crouched) upper body. This posture greatly restricts the spine's ability to rotate, which then forces the golfer to sacrifice posture to "borrow" mobility at a cost of stability elsewhere in the body. Over 70% of amateur golfers lose their posture in the golf swing, and we can attribute this to poor rotation. Poor sitting habits create dysfunctional patterns within the pelvis, which then lends to an inability to achieve the athletic posture required to execute an efficient golf swing.



### What are some of the challenges facing recreational golfers and their golf improvement?

The number one reason, according to an article written by the Economist in April 2015, why activity is on the decline within recreational golf is that the modern lifestyle is not conducive to playing a 4 hour round of golf. Time is a valuable commodity, and a round of golf takes anywhere from four to five and a half hours to complete. If you include travel- time to the golf course, warm up and a celebratory drink at the 19<sup>th</sup> hole with your playing partners, you are looking at a period in excess of 6 hours. Many corporate professionals, who work from dawn to dusk during the week, are becoming more reluctant to give up their precious weekends for an inconsistent, frustrating round of golf. They would much rather take up running or cycling as a form of exercise, as those activities do not take as long to complete.

Self-help information is another challenge that hinders recreational golfers. Gary Player, Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy have changed the way recreational golfers see fitness and golf. These golfers, along with others have been at the forefront of changing the perception of what it means to be a golf athlete. The challenge with this new perception is that recreational golfers see the finished “product” on the covers of magazines, or on TV, but what they don’t see is the work that it took to get the golfer to where he/she is. Recreational golfers then assume the incorrect path towards “looking” like a golf athlete, without understanding the physical requirements needed to be a golf athlete. The information available in magazines and online is good information, **but the secret to success lies not in the information, but the application of the information.** Incorrect application of good information can lead to frustration, regression of golf performance, and in some cases, even injury.

### How does Strength and Conditioning for golf apply to the recreational golfer?

The most important point to consider as a recreational golfer is that the load on the body throughout the golf swing does not change from an amateur level to a professional level. The rotational speeds of the hips, upper body, arms and golf club are comparable between amateur and professional golfers. Amateur golfers will make more golf swings in a round of golf due to a lower level of skill competency, which adds to the load on the body. Amateur golfers will also have inconsistent mechanics in the golf swing, which increases the chances of injury. Therefore, it is really important as a recreational golfer to ensure that you give yourself the best chance possible to play a good round of golf without hurting yourself. Here are some helpful hints.

- 1) **Train Specific:** general training achieves general results. If you want to play better golf, start directing your physical workouts towards the requirements needed for golf.
- 2) **Seek Professional assistance:** In order to get a tailored program to your specific needs as a golfer you need to consult with someone who has some kind of golf-related fitness certification.
- 3) **Stay away from quick fixes:** Quick fixes are like Band-Aids; they eventually lose their stickiness, and you will eventually run out of Band-Aids.
- 4) **Get Tested:** TPI have a slogan which they use to motivate their physical screening of golfers: if you aren’t testing, you’re guessing. Make sure that your fitness program is based on tests that can empirically show progression physically.
- 5) **Find a Good Golf Coach:** An improvement in your golf fitness will not automatically result in better golf. Your golf swing has been grooved around poor mechanics, and your body will revert back to the “old” golf swing if you do not groove better or more efficient movements. Professional golfers work with a golf coach all the time to ensure that their golf swing is functioning well with their body. A golf coach who understands the impact that the body has on the golf swing will help you to build a golf swing with your body, and work with your fitness trainer to ensure that you build a golf swing that is efficient, simple and most importantly, won’t lead to injury.

In summary then, we see that recreational golfers will indeed benefit from working with specialized golf fitness professionals to reduce injuries, create mechanical efficiency and improve their golf performance. This golf fitness expert is qualified not just to provide good information, but knows how and when to apply the information best.

