

FIT FOR GOLF

BY SUSAN HILL

Many golfers ask, “Is great golf the product of good genetics, good fortune or simply old-fashioned hard work?” The answer is all of the above. This is perhaps best illustrated by the real-life stories of golfers who have embraced a renewed commitment to fitness and to maintenance of an athletic body. Golfers who do so hold themselves to a higher standard of performance on the course, and the results have proven promising for their games and their careers.

One LPGA Tour player whose fitness routine has improved both her quality of life and her level of play is Cristie Kerr. Her journey should serve as an inspiration for golfers and non-golfers who need to improve their level of fitness. “Being a professional athlete, I have learned to build a lot of discipline into all aspects of my life from a young age,” Kerr said recently. But making the commitment to exercise regularly, lose weight and keep that weight off took more than just discipline. It required an overall lifestyle change.

One LPGA Tour player whose fitness routine has improved both her **quality of life** and her **level of play** is Cristie Kerr.

Kerr’s story begins a decade ago, when she was a talented young junior golfer and a rising star in the sport. Following high school, she qualified for the LPGA Tour and started to make a name for herself. Those early successes made it easy for her to focus on her strengths and so she paid less attention to her need to be in better physical conditioning. After all, when you’re winning tournaments and you commonly see your name on the leaderboard, there is less to be critical of. But after five years





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on the Tour, Kerr's need to be in better physical condition became increasingly apparent. She was carrying 185 pounds on her 5-foot, 3 ½-inch frame, which began to affect not only her quality of life, but her quality of play as well.

Kerr decided it was time to change.

So about four years ago she embarked on a 1,500-calorie-a-day diet and an intensive exercise regimen. "I met with both a nutritionist and trainer at Doral [Resort in Miami, Fla.] who gave me an exercise program of cardio four days per week and strength training four times per week," she says. "I was given both upper- and lower-body exercises and did all kinds of cardio, running, anything to get my heart going." Shortly thereafter, her hard work began to pay off as the weight came off. Within about a year, she had accomplished her fitness goals, losing an impressive 50 pounds and dropping from a size 12 to a size 2. In 2002, *Golf Digest* proclaimed her "The Incredible Shrinking Golfer."

The results, Kerr says, have been remarkable: "I've definitely seen a lot of improvement with my endurance. Walking four days straight, five to six miles each day on hills can be very taxing! The small, nagging problems I had while overweight don't bother me anymore. I have increased flexibility, and with the strength training exercises, I have gained a few extra yards."

Her current record speaks for itself: She secured victories in 2005 at the Wendy's Champions for Children tournament and the Michelob Ultra Open, and has 11 other top-10 finishes.

So, at what point does one decide enough valuable time has been wasted, and that it's time for action? For Kerr, a large part of deciding to reinvent her game was finding the proper motivation, which led her to look outside of golf and into her own family history. "I felt that I really needed to change things for health reasons," she explains. "My family has a history of diabetes, heart disease, cancer

—I didn't want to go down the same track, and this is what really pushed me to change my body and my lifestyle."

It's a motivation many can identify with, and Kerr suggests that the best way to respond is by

integrating wellness into every aspect of day-to-day life. Perhaps the most useful tool in Kerr's personal transformation was a nutrition diary in which she recorded her daily intake of calories, striving to

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keep them in the 1,500 to 1,600 calorie range.

"That really kept me in check, because I had a record of what I was eating, and I didn't want to feel guilty about any of it," Kerr says today. Even now, although she's not as regimented with what she eats, she tries to keep the same workout routine. "I don't have a strict diet and do help myself to treats every now and then," she says. "But it's mostly just moderation and knowing what I should and shouldn't eat."

Kerr is just one of many professional golfers who have discovered that being physically fit can improve one's game from head to toe: Better flexibility releases tension in the hips, shoulders and lower back. Smarter nutritional decisions may provide that match-winning burst of energy late in the round. And a lighter body weight will almost certainly improve a golfer's shoulder turn.

But what about all those days when you're just not up to the effort, when you're feeling tired or just plain sluggish? "Very importantly, you need to stick to a training program," Kerr says. "It's tough staying consistent while on the road." Like many of us, Kerr eats out often, but she believes the secret is to keep everything balanced. Her recommendations include ordering lean meats without all the extra sauces and making smart choices when selecting restaurants. She suggests choosing eateries with menus that offer a variety of menu options.

Finally, Kerr suggests, golfers should approach the decision to eat better and exercise more just as they would any golfing tip, even if it involves a little more work than simply adjusting their grip or altering their stance. "As long as you tell someone that doing 'X' will improve their game that usually is all they need to hear. Hitting the gym and working on flexibility, all of that helps with endurance, more distance, being less prone to injury."

And, as Kerr learned, when you exercise control over your body, you shouldn't be surprised to see a far greater level of control over your golf game. ■

