



Fit for Golf

Golf legend Gary Player offers exercise tips for keeping your game in full swing

To many, golf appears to be a relaxing sport played at a leisurely pace with little or no physical exertion. But in reality, golf can be rough on the body. Especially the back, says golfing legend Gary Player, who's won 163 tournaments around the world, traveled more than 14 million air miles (that's more than three years sitting in an airplane seat) and is one of only five golfers to have won the game's Grand Slam.

"Think about the fact that a golfer swings in one direction all his life and never balances the opposite muscles," Player says. "This puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the lower back." Player recommends swinging a weighted club with both the left and right hands to improve flexibility and balance both sides of the body.

At the Core

Susan Hill, a golf biomechanic certified by the prestigious CHEK (Corrective Holistic Exercise Kinesiology Institute of San Diego), trainer and president of FitnessforGolf.com, agrees that golfers' backs are all too prone to problems. "When people have low-back injuries, it's often because they need to strengthen the core muscles (the abdominals and low back). Those postural muscles help your body withstand what the golf swing is doing to your body."

One of Hill's favorite core strengtheners is an exercise called the Front Plank. To conduct this drill, lie facedown in a push-up position with your forearms resting on the floor. Elevate your body onto your toes and elbows while squeezing in your stomach muscles. Your body should form one line from your head to your heels. Aim to hold this position for 30 seconds





as you continue to breathe. “This pose puts the low back in a neutral position, so as you squeeze in the center of your abdomen to maintain the position, you strengthen the abdominals at the deepest level,” Hill says. Repeat the move two to three times a week as part of a complete fitness program.

According to Player, it is the strengthening of these core muscles that makes it easier to generate club-head speed and maintain stability through the golf swing.

A Leg Up

In addition to a strong torso, Player believes powerful legs are critical to success on the course and critical to developing a swing that will take a lesser toll on the body. “If you don’t have a strong lower body, you cannot get through the ball as well,” he explains. “You cannot create as much leverage, so you lose distance.” When this is the case, golfers tend to overcompensate by swinging harder, often resulting in injury. (See “In the Swing” at right for an at-home move to strengthen legs.)

Another group of muscles that are particularly sensitive (though often neglected by golfers) are those in the shoulders. “The rotator cuff muscles in the shoulder are a common injury for golfers,” Player says. And these small

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To build the stability and strength to protect your rotator cuff muscles, Hill recommends Shoulder Stabilizers: Lie face down on the floor with your arms extended out to each side. Pull your shoulder blades down and back as you lift your arms up and out to each side in a “T” formation, thumbs facing up toward the ceiling. Perform one to two sets of eight to 12 repetitions, a couple of times weekly.

The Heart of the Matter

It’s important to round out a fitness routine for better golf with a regular cardio program. Player favors mixing up his strength training with swimming, jogging, aerobics, biking and even dancing to “some funky music,” as well as good nutrition and adequate hydration. A pro since 1953, he calls all of these elements key to success and longevity in the game. Player notes that while he may have been the pioneer in development of golf fitness programs, the best golfers in the world today all have a dedicated fitness regimen. He says, “If you want to continue playing at a club or professional level, you need to stay fit and flexible.” ■ BY LORIE PARCH

In the Swing

“Big muscles in the legs and torso are the greatest source of power in the golf swing,” says golf legend Gary Player. Here, Player’s suggestion for an at-home move that builds powerful legs: the classic squat using an activity ball, a key tool for core-strengthening moves, too. “The ball is great for stability exercises and a must for any golfer—and it’s easy to keep and use at home,” says Player.

1. Start by standing next to a wall, feet shoulder-width apart and a dumbbell weighing five to 15 pounds in each hand.
2. Place a large exercise ball between your lower back and the wall. Lean into the ball and squat, lowering your thighs until they’re parallel to the floor. (The ball should roll up your back as you lower down.) Roll back up to standing.
3. Do three sets of 12 reps (each rep includes squatting and returning to standing), resting for one to two minutes between sets.