Add zing to your swing

Playing golf offers many health benefits, but make sure that you know how to swing your club right to avoid injuries. Ng Wan Ching reports

Golf as a sport offers plenty of health benefits. Just walking around the golf course can increase your exercise tolerance, which helps to improve cardiovascular fitness, said physiotherapist Benjamin Soon, an assistant professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

Swinging the golf club improves your body’s flexibility and helps to increase one’s muscle tone and endurance, he said.

This swinging action also boosts a golfer’s postural awareness, coordination and mental acuteness. On top of that, the sport helps the player to improve his psychological and social well-being. This is because golf is a social sport and provides opportunities to socialize in touch with friends and colleagues, he added.

THE PROPER SWING

Before you can reap the full benefits of this exercise, you have to be able to swing the golf club properly.

The golfer has to understand aspects such as good grip alignment, posture and back muscle control, which also play an essential role in helping the person maintain a good posture in daily activities, said Prof Soon.

For example, a golfer needs to make sure his back and neck are straight as he prepares to swing the golf club.

This movement also translates to a good posture in everyday life, as it trains the person to correct a slouching posture when he stands or sits down.

Flexibility is important to achieve a fluid, powerful golf swing, said Prof Soon, who is the programme director designated for academic programme at SIT.

To increase the power of your swing, it may help to do stretching exercises to increase flexibility in the chest area, the back and sides of the torso between the lower ribs and the pelvis, shoulder and hip, he added.

Stiffness in these joints may cause muscular injuries, as the person would rely too much on his arm strength to perform the swing, rather than using more of the muscles in the trunk, said Prof Soon.

This can be done with the help of specially designed exercises targeting stability, balance and control of the core muscles, such as plates, said Prof Soon.

FLEXIBILITY AND AGING

As we age, our general flexibility tends to worsen, just as joint articulation (the location where bones connect) may change due to degeneration on the joint surfaces, said Prof Soon.

For example, older people would generally have stiffer spines and joints, compared with younger people.

The different stages of a golf swing requires coordinated movement from various joints, such as the hip (pelvis), spine, shoulder, elbow and wrist.

A reduction in mobility of any one of these joints will affect the rest of the movement, he said.

For example, a reduction in spinal rotation may mean that the top hip joint (glutes) has to work harder to compensate for the lack of torso rotation during the golf swing.

In the long term, this may result in hip and back pain, said Prof Soon.

Not doing the golf swing properly may give rise to other health dangers. An insufficient torque rotation during the backswing, for instance, can cause the golfer’s palms to face up instead of down.

Excessive twisting motion of the hips and spine to gain more power and force during the downswing may strain the discs in the lower spine, which can lead to lower back pain, said Prof Soon.

Shifting one’s weight from one foot to another during a golf swing is a key component of a good swing.

Golfers who do not transfer their weight correctly may experience back strain, he added.

Overuse of the forearms (wrist and elbow) muscles to strike the ball is a common core muscles during a golf swing. This may result in injuries, such as golfer’s or tennis elbow, which are muscular strain on the inner and outer parts of the elbow.

People with golf-related injuries should seek further treatment or advice from a professional physiotherapist.

LIMBER UP

To keep your body limber, do warm-up exercises. These should include both static and dynamic stretching of all the major muscle groups involved in the golf swing.

These comprise muscles around the torso, the hamstrings in the legs, deltoid in the shoulders, pectoral major in the chest, and the various muscles which control the wrists, hands and elbows.

One set of static stretches for each muscle group, which involves holding each position for 15 seconds and ending with 30 seconds of concentric effort, can be made on the swing to keep the body moving in the correct direction.

The stretching target range is three times a week and plays at least nine holes once a week.

“Any exercise is good, and golf ticks all my boxes. Being outdoors and breathing in fresh air while getting exercise is perfect. Her greatest challenge is finding the time to play,”

The game takes time, be it on the putting or driving range, she said.

A game of nine holes takes about three hours, while 18 holes takes over four hours. “Hitting 100 balls at the range usually takes two hours, but I’m competing every weekend. It’s a bit of overkill,” she added.

To keep herself flexible and injury-free, she does a little yoga to stay limber and hits some free weights at home.

As she has tendinitis (repetitive inflammation) from years of water skiing, which is a careful not to push herself too hard when playing golf.

“Sometimes, I do need to tape my wrist and forearm for additional support,” she said.

She recommends golf to anyone who enjoys social interaction and wants a pain that together exercise.

“Golf is unique. It’s one of the few forms of exercise where age and medical conditions don’t preclude you from playing,” she said.

One can pick up the game at any age, unlike some challenging sports such as skiing or diving, where it is more difficult to get started at an older age.

“Why not start in 75 and still actively playing golf?” she said.

Ms Monteiro part in the 2015 Singapore Golf Challenge at Sentosa Golf Club.

““One of the hardest things for a lady golfer is to find lady golfers ‘lucks’, “ she said, referring to the Singapore veteran golfers who are prepared to take part to widen my group of lady golfers.”

He has been trying to improve his golf swing without getting injured. He demonstrates how it should be done in order to avoid injuries, accompanied by tips from physiotherapist and assistant professor Benjamin Soon.

You still have time to sign up if you want to join senior presenter of Kiss FM, Radio 3, Ms Clarence Monteiro (left), at the next World Golf Challenge. Venue: Sentosa Golf Club (Par 3 Course) Time: 11am to 9.30pm Format: Day: Double Peoria System (Satellited) Registration fees: $310 (includes lunch and dinner) To register: Call 6331 6428, e-mail gcresgolfph@com.sg or go to campaign: heronpolypus.com/hgw2015/

A. Do warm-up exercises before golfing. First, stand with the back and neck straight (photo 1). Then position your legs slightly apart, with your weight spread evenly on both feet. You should be standing roughly parallel to the direction you want to hit the ball (photo 2).

B. Flex both knees slightly, bend from the hips while keeping the back straight (photo 3). Take care to avoid bending the torso to throw the center of mass up to the hip-bone, as well as excessive arching of the lumbar spine (lower back).

C. During and after hitting the ball, use your core muscles, instead of the forearms (wrist and elbow), to generate power for the swing. Keep the arms extended as you hit the ball (photo 5).

The popping-up effect, commonly known as the “chicken wing”, is the aberrant bending of the left elbow for a right-handed golfer in the golf swing.

If the swing is fluid, the follow-through should naturally lead to an end position that is parallel, balanced and facing the target (photo 7).

The program cover wrap in a line does not make you technically apart, with your weight spread evenly on both foot. You should be standing roughly parallel to the direction you want to hit the ball (photo 2).

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