

Fit for Golf

Aerobic training for peak performance

By Annette M. Zaharoff, MD

This will be the last of three articles addressing the benefits of exercise and your golf game. In the previous two articles, I discussed how flexibility and strength exercises will increase your ability to hit a golf ball with more power and consistency as well as help prevent injuries. In this article, I would like to review the benefits of aerobic training in order to maintain peak physical fitness to help your golf game. In order to have a total fitness program, you should include cardiovascular training several times weekly in your workout program.

While walking 18 holes is more exercise than riding in a cart, it is not the same as actually doing aerobic training because of the stopping and starting while you play. To improve cardiovascular endurance, you should choose an exercise that works the large muscle groups rhythmically and keeps you breathing hard for at least 20 to 30 minutes. Exercise 3 to 5 times per week. Select an aerobic activity that suits you. Activities like running, brisk walking, bicycling, swimming, rowing machines, and elliptical trainers provide sustained, vigorous movement. If you have bone or joint problems, the lower impact activities may be less stressful to these areas and safer.

Depending on your fitness level, you need to exercise between 60 to 80 percent of your maximum heart rate to obtain the cardiovascular benefits. A rough estimate of your maximum heart rate is calculated by subtracting your age from 220. Multiply that number by .60, .70, or .80 to figure out the target heart rate at which to exercise. If you are just starting out, begin at the lower level of 60 percent, gradually increasing your intensity as you continue your workouts. Check with your physician if you have any heart problems or risk factors.

With aerobic conditioning, not only does your body benefit, but your golf game will too. With improved stamina, you will experience less fatigue, which may improve consistency. You can also adjust to long or hilly courses easier, cope with hot weather better, and end your round with a strong finish!

While playing golf is not enough activity to meet the requirements for aerobic exercise (even if you walk quickly from one hole to the next), there are still some health benefits to be gained. You can cover four to five miles while playing a round of golf which may add some endurance and strength to the leg muscles.

If you have specific questions about how to get started or any particular orthopedic issues, contact your sports medicine physician. Including flexibility, strength, and aerobic exercise in your fitness program will have you shaving strokes off your handicap in no time. You can view my website for a review of the “Fit for Golf” articles.

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