



GOLF IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH retirement and relaxation, but do not let this low-intensity sport fool you into discounting it as a means of burning calories or a reason to work out to build muscle.

“Although golf is primarily a game of skill, a golfer can derive health benefits from the sport,” says Dr Jason Chia, Head of Tan Tock Seng Hospital’s Sports Medicine and Surgery Clinic.

Get In Shape

By walking from hole to hole on an 18-hole course and not relying on a golf cart, golfers cover at least eight kilometres of ground. That totals more than the 10,000 steps a day that the Health Promotion Board (HPB) recommends for good health and calorie-burning.

In addition, a golf course is typically undulating, and walking across this terrain is a gentle form of hill training suitable for older folks or those just starting out.

Many of golf’s health benefits are also derived from the exercises that a golfer can perform off the green to improve his game, and thus the sport can be a source of motivation for those keen to get fit. In fact, many top professional golf players like Lee Westwood and Tiger Woods spend hours in the gym working out to build strength and flexibility, thereby improving their game.

“The golf swing can require explosive strength. It uses muscles from the trunk, as well as upper

Fitness TO A TEE

GOLFING CAN BE MORE BENEFICIAL FOR YOUR HEALTH THAN YOU THINK.

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and lower limbs,” says Dr Chia. He recommends a golf-specific weight-training regime including deadlifts, burpees and squats to improve flexibility, core strength and stability to improve the swing. Strengthening muscles and improving flexibility can also prevent common golfing injuries (see sidebar).



COMMON INJURIES

These two conditions are exacerbated if the muscles are weak, so be sure to engage in regular strength training.

● GOLFER'S ELBOW

Also known as medial epicondylitis, golfer's elbow is characterised by a dull pain emanating from the inner side of the elbow. It is caused by the inflammation of the tendons connecting the forearm to the elbow.

PREVENTIVE EXERCISE

Strengthen forearm muscles by performing wrist curls with a lightweight dumbbell. Squeezing an old tennis ball several times a day is also effective.

● LOWER BACK PAIN

When you swing, you exert a lot of pressure on your spine and muscles. Poor flexibility coupled with inadequate muscle strength can lead to muscle strain, which can cause pain in the lower back.

PREVENTIVE EXERCISE

Strengthen your back with dumbbell rows and cable pulldown exercises, beginning with light weights. Increase weights gradually. Yoga and pilates have also proven to be effective.

These conditions are treated with regular icing with ice packs, painkillers and adequate rest.



RISKS WHEN PLAYING GOLF

Having Fun In The Sun

Golf exposes players to the sun, and thus increases vitamin D levels. A healthy dose of this vitamin is essential to maintain strong bones, teeth and a healthy immune system. Various studies have shown that vitamin D deficiencies can lead to sleep disorders, particularly daytime sleepiness.

Unless you are competing in a tournament, chances are you are golfing to relax with a friend or two. The highly social nature of the game can increase self-esteem and happiness, and this in turn can help alleviate depressive symptoms. The fresh air and green spaces of the golf course have also been shown to reduce stress levels. **LW**



Sun

A beautiful sunny day is perfect for a game — if you're prepared for it. Singapore has one of the world's highest ultraviolet indexes, so one can get sunburnt after just five minutes of continuous exposure to harsh sunlight. Wear sunscreen (SPF 30 is sufficient) and sunglasses, and if possible, long-sleeved clothing and a cap.



Lightning



Golf and lightning do not mix. Singapore has one of the highest rates of lightning activity in the world according to the National Environment Agency, and thunderstorms can develop without warning. Check with your golf club for lightning precautions before heading out.

Dehydration



Ensure that you remain sufficiently hydrated when out on the greens. Do not wait till you're thirsty to drink — make it a point to sip water every 15 minutes, recommends HPB.