

The Importance of Strength and the Golf Swing

In the game of golf, strength is most often associated with distance, how far you hit the ball. Although it feels good to send your tee shot high and far, strength training for golf is important for reasons other than extra distance. First and foremost, strength (together with flexibility) provides the foundation for a more efficient, reliable golf swing, two qualities better players share. An efficient golf swing, or any athletic movement for that matter, requires some degree of stability, power, balance and coordination. And, guess what? Strength training provides a foundation for these. In other words, you can't improve your club head speed without first increasing stability and power. And you can't optimize your power without sufficient balance and coordination. And in order to maintain it for 18 holes, you need endurance. A comprehensive, golf specific strength training program, when combined with flexibility training, will therefore promote a more efficient and reliable golf swing, increase your endurance, and not to be overlooked, will reduce the risk of injury.

1. **Efficiency:** probably one of the more important results of strength training is improved efficiency. Strength in our legs, hips, trunk and arms, which make up the 'links' that connect the 'kinetic chain' that is our body, provides a stable base of support between each link. This allows the forces we generate throughout the swing to be more efficiently transferred from one link to the other and into the club head (and golf ball) with more power and control but with less effort and less stress on the body. A more efficient swing also contributes to the following:
2. A more **reliable** swing: strength training improves our ability to maintain our posture throughout the swing. Dynamic postural strength (combined with flexibility), provides a more consistent axis of rotation throughout the golf swing and allows for more precise coordination of the legs and arms with our core. Improved postural strength also promotes better balance throughout the swing.
3. **Endurance:** strength training improves our muscular endurance which delays the onset of fatigue. Fatigue will cause a breakdown in one or more links within the chain and will lead to any number of faults such as loss of posture and timing, which isn't conducive to an efficient or reliable swing.
4. **Injury prevention:** improved efficiency and endurance, as described above, greatly reduces the risks of injury. Strong muscles, tendons, ligaments and connective tissue improves our strength and tissue resistance in addition to our joint mechanics, improving the body's ability to absorb and distribute the stress of the golf swing, especially throughout the spine.

Anybody can benefit from a golf specific strength training program but everybody is different. Juniors, seniors, men, women and people with a history of injury each have strengths and weaknesses that need to be addressed. Your program should be balanced, focused and incorporate as many golf specific movement patterns as possible. Balance includes utilizing both sides of the body and targets the small muscle groups, such as the rotator cuff in the shoulder, as well as the large muscle groups, such as those in the legs, hips and back. While most of our strength and power is generated from the more familiar larger muscles, the less recognized smaller muscle groups are important because they act as "stabilizers", anchoring one or more links together to provide a firm base of support for the larger muscles to pull from. This allows the larger muscles to work more efficiently. Weak and/or tight stabilizers reduce the strength, power and efficiency of the larger muscles. Utilizing golf specific exercises trains golf specific movement patterns so you are training coordination and balance in addition to strength (but this doesn't mean that isolation exercises aren't effective). Focusing on the purpose of each exercise and each workout and how it relates to your game will keep it practical and more fun.

In short, an efficient and reliable swing are two qualities that better players share despite their individual styles or swing types. Complement your lessons with a comprehensive conditioning program that includes flexibility and strength (don't forget the cardio) and your swing will become more efficient and reliable, improving your consistency, balance and power while reducing your risk of injury.

But strength training also provides stability and improves our coordination. Strength in our legs, hips, back, shoulders and arms, which make up the links that connect our kinetic chain, provides a stable base of support for each succeeding link to work off. This allows the forces we generate throughout the golf swing to be transferred through each link to the club head and golf ball in a more efficient and coordinated manner. Improved efficiency yields greater power with less effort and less stress on the body. Core strength (strength in our trunk and hips) is important because it provides the foundation for the extremities to move on. The more stable and efficient our trunk and hips, the more efficient our extremities are. **It doesn't matter how fast you can swing a golf club if the foundation on which you are swinging is not stable enough to control the path of the golf club.**

John Hinds is a licensed Physical Therapist and lifelong golfer who specializes in Golf Conditioning, Orthopedic Rehabilitation and Injury Prevention. He is included among the Titleist Performance Institute's Approved Fitness Professionals.