



Keeping golfers in golf

Club golfers have much to gain by adopting similar fitness training as professionals.

One of the essential parts of my job is getting on the road to speak with club members about golf-specific fitness. Club members are the lifeblood of an industry that contributes \$2.7 billion to the Australian economy.

Last November at Avondale Golf Club in Sydney's north I gave a 90-minute presentation to a diverse group of 40 members, ranging from teenagers to seniors over the age of 70. Avondale is a progressive private club, which is addressing an ageing membership. With no waiting list for the first time in years, the club wants to keep its older membership playing longer.

I was impressed by the club's attitude of placing a value on keeping members active and part of the club. "If just one member continues to play for one more year, the subscription payment alone pays for six of these sessions," says administration manager Daniel Constable.

Avondale saw the presentation as an add-on benefit that most clubs don't offer, sending the message it's genuinely concerned with the health and wellbeing of members. Adds Constable: "The response from members has been very positive and surprisingly from the group of members we didn't necessarily expect. We struggled to get spots in this session for the major pennant players and low handicappers because of the popularity with our older members.

"Mid and high handicaps just want to keep enjoying their golf and don't want to see a back injury or something keep them out of playing with their friends and family."

Another reason for the visit to Avondale was concern about the practice habits of its growing junior membership. As a duty of care, the club doesn't want to see teenagers bashing balls on the range for hours at a time, burning out of the game by 20 years of age.

"We want to see them know good practice habits, stretch and how to break up their practice sessions and be playing well into their 30s and 40s and 50s," says Constable. "And hopefully go onto good playing careers for the young guys who are looking to be a low player."

In position to swing

'Keeping Golfers In Golf' would be an appropriate title for my presentation at Avondale. I began by outlining some key points about golf-specific fitness.

I like to make the presentation as interactive as possible. I'll ask the audience to perform some basic exercises to feel their posture. It's about kinaesthetic awareness. I want them to fire their golf 'Christmas Tree' muscles – the larger primal muscles that control the golf swing. I stress that these drills



A mixture of theory and practical exercises gives members a good understanding of their body's movement patterns.



If your body can't function properly, neither will the golf swing.

are suitable for the best players in the world as well as 80-year-olds.

It's important to emphasise the need to attain certain positions throughout the golf swing. If you can't put yourself into those positions, then it's unlikely you'll function consistently for any significant length of time. And you'll be prone to injury.

Men often suffer from 'sticky hips', which means they can't separate their upper and lower body. This makes it very difficult to sequence their body in the golf swing. Likewise, when the arms get disconnected from your body, it leads to poor movement patterns.

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Our work at the Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic has identified 14 motor patterns that can break down in a golfer's body. I like to show the five primary breakdowns in the golf swing: poking chin, kyphosis, scoliosis, sway back and fixed flexion. For example, I'll simulate the golf swing of a person with rounded shoulders (kyphosis) to emphasise how it affects their ability to turn through and hit the ball efficiently. The purpose is to give some insight into dysfunctional function.

The club professional can also help to reinforce a message. It adds weight when somebody like Avondale professional Mark Paterson agrees that golfers would benefit from a session with a physiotherapist. Says Paterson: "As a coach trying to work on a certain move, I can't get it to happen unless the body is in sync."

It's important to emphasise rotation. A lightbulb moment occurred for me after seeing my father suffer from complications due to Parkinson's disease. He used to cycle in his youth and was a very fit person with a lot of power. That power came from the rotation and the strength in his body. But with Parkinson's the body starts to develop fixed posture. I realised that when you develop fixed posture in the golf swing, you lose rotation and start to get more flexion. And once your frame goes, you lose balance.

To illustrate the point, I played a video clip of Søren Hansen performing an advanced balance and rotation drill. His movement was fluent and controlled. In contrast, our footage of a female amateur showed her struggling with the same drill. Movement was very staggered, while her head was in a fixed position. I was able to relate how if your head stays still, you can't rotate properly onto your right-hand side in the golf swing.

I try not to overload the audience with information. (Some members will follow up and book a musculoskeletal screening.) But I recommend they go away and work on some of the basic drills they've been shown. It's about making people aware of poor posture, educating and empowering them and making them accountable. If you don't do the exercises, you're not going to reap the benefits.

Footnote: I was delighted to hear that one female golfer who attended my Avondale presentation went out the following day and shot 42 Stableford points.

Contact Ramsay McMaster on 0407 432 282 for advice about golf-specific training. Call the Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448 to purchase a golf-specific 'Fitness Survival Kit'.