



Andy Wadsworth has been Chris Wood's personal fitness trainer for the past four years. During the coming months, he will show Fairway to Green readers how they can improve their game by getting fit for golf . .

WHERE Tiger Woods leads, the rest of the golfing world follows. How often has that phrase been uttered over the years during which the phenomenal American has dominated his chosen sport?

Given that the great man is currently recovering from serious knee surgery, it's perhaps a little odd to be talking about his undoubted effect on the heightened levels of fitness in professional golf.

But personal trainer Andy Wadsworth has no doubt that Tiger is almost single-handedly responsible for the way in which many of the world's leading players (though there are some notable exceptions!) now view the physical side of their game.

"You need to get to the situation where you are so strong that you can just keep on practising – that's the main reason why Tiger Woods is so much better than anyone else," says Wadsworth, who has looked after the physical progress of Bristol golfer Chris Wood for the past four years.

"Tiger took it all to a totally different level. He was training with American footballers and doing some old-fashioned, heavy exercising to make himself so much stronger than everyone else.

"Then he started to think about how he could relate his new strength to the golf swing – core, flexibility and rotation being the key areas."

Since Woods first burst onto the scene, many of his contemporaries have been playing catch-up on the fitness front – with varying degrees of success, it has to be said.

Wadsworth's advantage is that he is mainly cajoling and nurturing young talent just setting out on their golfing careers – apart from Wood, he also looks after the likes of Chris Lloyd and Hannah Barwood, two West Country teenagers who already seem destined to reach the top.

Fitness and strength is now as important a part of the serious golfer's armoury as a gleaming new putter or the latest powerful driver. They're all looking for that extra edge and many are finding it, not on the driving range, but in the gym. "Chris had a back problem when I first met him, mainly through growing too fast," recalls Wadsworth, a former accomplished athlete now running his own business in Bristol. "The idea was to work on his core stability, flexibility and get him through that period of growth.

"It's a bit of a miracle that he's got this far without any major injuries. The main goal all along is to remain injury free so he can practise as much as he wants.

"Now we're working towards exercises that are totally related to his golf swing."

That department in "Team Woody" belongs solely to Paul Mitchell, head professional at Bristol and Clifton Golf Club and coach to a young man he has seen progress steadily from club and county level – at Long Ashton and Gloucestershire – straight through to the world stage at last year's Open Championship.

"Paul is able to look at any weaknesses there may be in the swing then ask me how we can go about solving the problem from a physical point of view.

"Then it's a case of general strength and conditioning. Chris is working pretty hard on his cardio fitness as well. I think that's an

area where a lot of golfers are lacking.

"Some people think that they just have to do a few simple exercises but, actually, if your cardio fitness is better, you recover a lot quicker, whether the exercise is gym related or concentrated on core stability.

"The energy levels have got to be super high all the time, too, to be able to keep going out and playing one round after another. So a player's nutrition has to be spot on."

It is relatively straightforward to monitor Wood's fitness and wellbeing when he is back home in North Somerset but the task is not quite so easy when he's away playing on the European Tour.

That's when a series of detailed notes on diet and exercise tend to come into their own.

"When players are on tour it all becomes harder because there isn't the time to do so much work in the gym. But we have photos of all the exercises so he can use those when he's away. We also chat on the phone and just try to get it right.

"It's very difficult to make any significant progression when you're out there for four or five weeks. You just need to try to avoid injury then, when you come back, you can really go for it again.

"On the days when Chris is not actually playing in a tournament, we're looking at building bigger muscles and involving the core stability exercises."

At 6ft 5in, it's fair to assume that Wood, who turned 21 at the end of November, has stopped growing!

But Wadsworth points out that his tall, wiry frame has produced its own particular pitfalls over the years.

"Since we started, Chris has put on about three-and-a-half stones but we're always trying to up that as one of his problems is having a fast metabolism.

"We're not trying to slow that down, because it's great for his recovery, but we need to make sure he gets the right food.

"He needs to try to put on another stone this winter to get more strength in certain areas. That's mainly around the core – the middle of the body – which is so important when you're rotating.

"Stability helps you hit the ball further and straighter. Because Chris is so tall, a tiny movement in the centre of his body makes a big difference. By the time it gets as far as his arms and his feet, it becomes a huge leverage and makes a big difference.

"It's something he has to work on for the rest of his golf career – every day.

"The whole process is never ending – as soon as you sort out one thing, something else comes along."

Wood himself is convinced that his regime can only help him become one of the best golfers in the world.

"Because of the fitness levels, I'm able to play as much golf as I want; maybe take a day off, then start practising again.

"All three of us will discuss what the problems might be. Andy can explain how the muscles are moving after Paul's assessment of what needs to be done and you can then identify the weaker areas.

"We're trying to build a consistent, repeatable swing and it's a question of not leaving any stone unturned."

Find out more about Andy Wadsworth's work by visiting www.mylifefit.com

Spring into action

Spring is only just round the corner and it's time to start thinking about entering your first events or just planning some time off to play golf.

Whatever level you are at golf is a game where everyone wants to not just maintain performance but make improvements. There is always lots of talk about how to find your perfect game.

Have you thought about all the attributes that contribute to your game? Golf fitness is key. Golf may look to some like an amiable pastime, but players like Tiger Woods have changed all that.

The movement of the golf swing is very complex due to its high-speed muscular movements with rotation and, at the same time, it demands great focus and control.

To become a better golfer, you have to practise as much as possible, there are no short cuts.

As with many other sports, however, it is not just a matter of practising the game itself.

In order to practise for long periods of time, using complex muscular movement, you will have to be fit.

If you are not, your body will simply break down through overuse injuries, preventing you from improving and enjoying your game.

Over the coming months GPT (www.golfpt.co.uk) will cover a number of areas which will have a direct effect on your game. Core Stability, Flexibility, Injuries, Nutrition and Golf Specific Strength Training.



Core stability

Core stability is a phrase that is used more and more around the golf course, but are you sure what it means?

Core stability describes the strength of the muscles that hold your spine and pelvis in place, just like a pole and guy ropes hold up a tent.

Without core stability you will be prone to injury and poor performance, no matter how well developed your other muscles are. The fitter, faster and more powerful you get in the golf swing, the more core strength you will need to cope with the demands placed on your body.

For example, you may have the strongest arms and legs in the world but if your core stability is poor, the middle of your body may twist and turn under pressure, affecting the rest of the movement pattern of your golf swing.

Many people think they can simply do a few sets of sit ups and that will solve the core strength but, in actual fact, normal sit ups will do virtually nothing to aid your golf swing, especially when the technique of most people's sit ups are very poor.

Thousands of years ago our ancestors had good core muscles due to their constantly being on the move, hunting, gathering, building shelters and felling trees. But today all the muscles in the trunk spend most of their time asleep due to our sedentary lifestyle.

Discover a lot more about what you can do to improve your core stability in Fairway to Green next month.



Flexibility

Flexibility is another essential attribute to being a great golfer. Unfortunately flexibility training is one of the most frequently ignored and badly understood parts of most people's fitness routines.

You should, however, treat it with all the seriousness and commitment that you would for any other part of your physical training or golf practice.

There are a few tests you can do to assess your flexibility. Lack of flexibility in certain muscles can lead to muscle imbalances, which will lead to incorrect movement in your golf swing.

Unfortunately, the more time spent using the incorrect muscles, the harder it is for you to correct swing faults.

Stretching to remain flexible is not new to your body. Everyone is born with great flexibility but, as we get older, we become less and less flexible due to lack of activity, sitting for long periods, and injuries from everyday life and sport.

Flexibility is the range of mobility around a joint and the muscles that surround it.

Regular flexibility training will reduce the risk of injury, create a range of movement (especially as a muscle reaches its outer limits of movement); improve the movement around a joint; reduce muscular ache; increase co-ordination; increase blood flow circulation; break down scar tissue from general and overuse injuries; and equip your body to cope with the specific

demands of your golf.

Future issues of Fairway to Green will outline the types of stretching methods you should adopt and a number of stretches to maintain and improve your flexibility, specific to the golf swing.

Injuries

Practice, practice and more practice will make you into a better player. Apart from finding the time to practise the other most limiting factor is injuries.

Your main goal and intention for physical training off the golf course should be to prevent injuries occurring on it. Prevention is better than cure.

But should you get injured, you will need to know how to cope with the injury, make it better and prevent the same injury from happening again.

Follow the articles to come, which will give you detail of some of the most common injuries in golf.

Nutrition

To get the most out of your game you need to focus on nutrition just as much as your fitness training and golf practice.

No matter how hard you train, if you eat the wrong food at the wrong time, you will hinder your progress and you may also experience fatigue, illness and injury.

Over the coming months in Fairway to Green, we will reveal the reality behind quick fix diets and explain why

you should simply eat healthily.

The key is to know which foods are good for you, when to eat them and their effect on your performance.

Equipped with this knowledge, you will have so much more energy to practise harder for longer and achieve your goal of a better a game.

There are many questions about diet . . . do you eat more carbohydrates or should you just eat proteins?

Do you eat three meals a day or five smaller ones? What foods will work for you?

Before considering this, we will go back to the past to get the facts on what our ancestors ate 10,000 years ago and how food has evolved at a different rate to civilization.

When you have the facts you will find it easy to make good decisions on your nutrition.

Playing in tournaments day after day is like a marathon.

As well as physically getting round the course, you also have to remain focused and be able to recover for the next day.

If you don't put the right fuels in, you won't get the right energy for your body.

Strength Training

Going to a gym and beginning a program of strength training can make you feel intimidated due to lack of knowledge and the surroundings.

It is rare to find a fitness instructor who can adapt their skills and knowledge to give you strength training exercises which will be specific to your golf.

We will give you the exercises which will help you to hit the ball further and feel stronger through the movements during your golf swing.

Not only will you hit the ball further, you will also be able to get better control by improving your neuromuscular system, co-ordination, balance and posture.

Strength training for your golf will build and tone over 600 muscles in your body and reduce the risk of injury, especially lower back injuries.

For your general health strength training will help to increase your metabolism, strengthen your bones, reduce the risk of bone degenerating diseases such as osteoporosis, lower your blood pressure, heart rate, decrease the risk of diabetes and certain cancers and promote and increase of good cholesterol.



To get you on the way to being golf fit start by doing the following tests to assess yourself before the work starts to get you in the shape of your life. There are many tests which can be used to make a more in depth assessment, but for the purpose of getting started we will keep it simple.

TEST 1:

This will test your cardiovascular efficiency, the ability of your body to recover fast after an increase in the intensity of your exercise.

If you are out on the golf course you need your heart rate to lower as fast as possible after walking between shots especially on hillier courses.

Procedure – After a 5 minute warm up of walking at a steady pace walk up a hill that lasts 2-3 minutes at a brisk pace.

At the top of hill make a note of your heart rate by counting the beats on your pulse for 6 seconds then multiplying it by 10 to get total number of beats in a minute.

Then after a minutes rest record your heart rate again. You should see a drop in heart rate.

Results –

A drop of more than 30 beats
= *good level of cardiovascular fitness.*

A drop of 20-30 beats
= *average cardiovascular fitness*

A drop of less than 20 beats
= *low cardiovascular fitness*

TEST 2:

This test will give an indication of how good your core stability is which is so important

in providing a solid platform to move from, provide control and avoid injury.

Procedure – Stand on one leg in front of the mirror with your arms out in front of you for balance and squat down.

Results – If you find your hips stay in line with each other with no rotation or lateral movement occurring your core stability may be good. If your hips do move and rotate this is a sign of lack of strength in your core muscles.

TEST 3:

This test will give you an indication of the flexibility in the back of your legs and lower back which must be flexible to cope with the demands of your golf set up position and swing.

Procedure – Lie on your back with one leg pulled up towards you keeping it as straight as possible. When you start to feel the muscles in the back of your upper leg tighten make a note of where your leg is.

Results – If your leg reaches over 90 degrees you have a good level of flexibility. If it doesn't get to 90 degrees you need to make a special effort to improve your flexibility.