

# Golf

*A guide for people  
with heart conditions*



**ACPICR**

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists  
In Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

Golf is very good for maintaining and improving health and fitness and is an enjoyable, social way to keep active outdoors.

## What are the specific benefits?

- Increase and maintain your stamina
- Increase and maintain your muscle strength and joint suppleness
- Improve your co-ordination and balance
- Improve your confidence and well being
- May help you to maintain a healthy body weight and shape.

## When could I start?

This will depend on your own circumstances and specific cardiac condition. It is recommended you have an assessment with a cardiac rehabilitation (CR) exercise professional who will provide advice and guidance.

If you have had Open-Heart surgery

- You should wait at least twelve weeks before returning to full golf to ensure good healing of the breast bone.

If you have a pacemaker or implantable cardioverter device (ICD)

- Dependent on your device you may need to wait six weeks to allow the leads to settle

## How can I get started?

If you can walk up an incline or a flight of stairs comfortably your fitness should allow you to start playing golf in some form.

However, you will need to take into account the following considerations

- the course terrain
- how long it will take you to complete your game
- possibly using a buggy in the short or long term.

## The next step

- Attend cardiac rehabilitation exercise sessions.
- Walk regularly and build up distance and inclines gradually on differing terrains.
- 18 holes of golf is often around 5 miles of walking. So make sure this is achievable. Then practice walking your course.
- As with any activity, 'start low and go slow'
- Start with a half swing and build up the length and speed of your swing.
- Start with the driving range or a putting green
- Play less holes to begin with or start on a flatter course



*Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice as soon as possible.*

## What about warm up and cool down?

- You should include gentle walking and gentle shoulder movement as it is important to prepare your heart and body for activity
- Practice your swing initially without a golf club
- Start and finish at a slower pace



## How should I feel during my session?

- You should feel comfortable and be able to continue with the activity
- It is okay to be slightly out of breath as long as you can still talk in full sentences. If not, slow down
- If you are exhausted the following day you have probably overdone it and need to reduce the length of game next time by playing fewer holes.

## Other things to consider

- Do not allow yourself to be pressured by other golfers into rushing your game or walking faster than you feel comfortable to do. Pace yourself and rest as required.
- If you are struggling to keep up with the pace of play you should reduce the intensity of the game. Try to ensure your partner /opponent plays at your skill level.
- Only play when you are feeling well.
- If you have a pacemaker or ICD you may need to alter your technique to avoid overstretching your arm during the follow through phase of your swing to protect the leads.
- Dress appropriately for the weather: remember the heart works harder on cold and windy days as well as when it is hot and humid.
- Do not hold your breath whilst lifting equipment or whilst concentrating on your swing.
- Take care when lifting your golf equipment, initially you may need to carry less clubs or use an electric trolley or buggy.
- You may need to slow down if you are walking up an incline.
- If you have to stand still for long keep your feet moving gently or wriggle your toes to help the circulation
- Take your time bending down. If you feel lightheaded or dizzy after bending, consider using a golf ball retriever.

**Stop exercising if you experience any chest discomfort, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/ or your GTN spray/tablets, seek medical advice as soon as possible.**



This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiovascular rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

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