GOLF

Swinging for the Health and Fun of It!

By: Deborah Liv Johnson

Drive the length of the Coachella Valley and you will surely notice an armada of golf courses dotting the landscape. Golfing in the desert has become one of America's favorite pastimes, combining temperate weather, sunshine and green fairways. Courses are booked year-round, even during the desert's off-season summer months as golfers swing their way to a day of finesse, friends and strategy.

According to some sources, golf dates back to the 1400s in Britain, specifically in Scotland. Modern day golf emerged in the 19th century, eventually finding its way to the United States. In 1894, delegates from golf clubs in New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Chicago met to form the Amateur Golf Association of the United States, which later became the United States Golf Association.

Golfers tend to be a devoted, enthusiastic lot, and with good reason. Most golf courses are known for their beauty as well as their challenges, and golfers are driven to return again and again, determined to best the course, avoid rogue trees and steer clear of ponds, lakes and sand traps. Typically played in groups of four, golf is a wonderful way to socialize and to exercise. The game requires physical and mental fortitude, and to keep it fun, a good sense of humor.

Health Benefits

The health benefits of golfing include staying active and fit, improving muscle tone and endurance, and sharpening one's hand-eye coordination. Walking a golf course instead of driving a cart will add even more benefit and burn more calories. Some golfers enjoy slinging their bags over their shoulders while others prefer to use golf bag pull carts. Either way, walking 18-holes of a golf course for a two to three hour time span is a great way to exercise.

Equipment

Buying golf equipment is an investment — beginners may want to borrow clubs from a relative or friend. Keep in mind clubs should be borrowed from someone similar in height to avoid using clubs that are too long or too short. If buying clubs, ask for advice from experienced golfers in addition to doing research. The basic clubs needed are the driver, a 3-wood, 3-, 5-, 7- and 9-irons, a pitching wedge, sand wedge and putter. A golf club bag is also a must.

Golf balls can be expensive and beginning golfers may go through as many as eight balls on an 18-round course. Consider buying used golf balls if your stroke is not up to par. Golf shoes aren't required on most courses; however, if you decide to play golf on a regular basis, budget for a set of golf shoes. They are specially engineered to prevent sliding during a golf swing. Golf shoes are available with or without spikes.

Consider Lessons

Golf lessons are a good way to develop proper techniques and avoid bad habits. Lessons will also allow you to progress much faster in learning the game with helpful suggestions and critique as you go. Check with local courses about what services and lessons they may offer. Off-season golf lessons are often considerably less expensive than prime season rates.

Tips to Avoid Injuries

As with any sport, warming up, stretching and performing gentle mobility movements will decrease the likelihood of injury while golfing. Beginning or infrequent golfers should pay close attention to how they feel throughout their games and avoid pushing themselves past their comfort zone. Wear sun protection and always carry plenty of water and light snacks. Know the basic rules and etiquette for playing golf, and most importantly, remember to have fun.

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