Older Golfers Benefit from Functional Training

"Functional training" refers to the use of therapeutic exercise progressions to improve joint stability, coordination, strength and endurance in both rehabilitating injury and more recently to enhance performance. This method of exercise programming is seen by many to be the latest fad in fitness and performance training. Unfortunately, this perception has resulted from a lack of research to collaborate the claims made by practitioners. **A study published last month in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* was one of the first to put "functional training" to the test.**

The study performed at the **University of San Francisco** evaluated the effects of a **specific functional training protocol on both golf performance and function in older men**. Eighteen male recreational golfers between ages 60 and 80 years were divided into two groups, intervention and controls.

The intervention group participated in three 90-minute training sessions per week for 8-weeks. **The exercise program was based on the Optimum Performance Training model developed by the National Academy of Sports Medicine.** This system is designed to guide the trainer in progressing exercise **from an initial emphasis on spinal stabilization and neuromuscular control** to strength building and then finally to improving speed and power.

Participants were assessed using the **Senior Fitness Test (SFT)**, a battery of six tests that represent functional ability, and **Club Head Speed (CHS)** was evaluated using a SwingMate radar device.

At the end of 8-weeks, **four of the six tests of function had improved significantly** indicating that the "functional" exercise progression used in the study was indeed effective. **Performance measures also showed significant improvement as CHS increased on average 3.9 mph.** Such increases in CHS are associated with an increased drive distance of 10-15 yards or more, a **definite advantage on the golf course**. Interestingly, the controls showed a slight decrease in CHS at the conclusion of the study.

Although the application of this training method is broad, improvement in the SFT measures **indicates a reduced risk of falls and potentially fewer injuries for an older adult population**.

Thompson, C.J. et al. (2007) Functional Training Improves Club Head Speed and Functional Fitness in Older Golfers. Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research.21