

Ladies, “Swing” Into the Game of Golf Your Way!

By Bonnie Robinson

Golf is the fastest-growing sport in North America, and women’s golf is its fastest-growing segment. Yet, I can’t tell you how many women I’ve met who tell me that they are reluctant to take up the game.

Maybe it’s the sport’s competitive image that puts women off — those professional tournaments, competitive situations where the success and reputation of the golfer rests on every shot. In fact for recreational golfers, the opposite is true. Golf is a sport where your only competitor is yourself.

Let me make a case for playing golf: It is a sport for life and you can take it up at any age! It’s a game you can play with anyone — with friends, with family, and with others you meet for the very first time on the golf course. Golf is good for your health. It’s an outdoor, low-impact sport, which promotes balance, strength, and flexibility. As a social sport, it is one of the best tools for expanding friendships, both personal and professional.

OK, so your head says there are lots of great reasons for taking up the game, but you’re still feeling uncomfortable. Keep in mind the following to help make it easier and so much more enjoyable for you when you do take up the game.

Playing Golf With Women is More Comfortable

Most women are more at ease playing the game with other women, particularly when they first take up the sport. Women remember what it was like when they first started golfing. We’re an encouraging and supportive gender!

Lessons Are Important

The game is less frustrating and more enjoyable if you take lessons when you start to play, and at the beginning of every season. Basic tips from a golf pro will give you pointers on what to keep in mind when you practice and play. During your lesson, also ask the pro to give you the basics on golf etiquette. Many women also find taking lessons from woman golf pro helps. If you are looking for a good book for a beginner golfer, an easy read is *Feeling Naked on the First Tee — An Essential Guide for New Women Golfers* by Ann Kelly.

Ease Into the Game

Playing 9-hole golf is a great way to get started. It’s a shorter game and takes no more than two hours to play (an important factor when you consider the busy lifestyles of women today). Also, make it convenient for yourself: Find a course close to where you work or live. All courses have 9-hole green fees and if you play at the end of the day, they will often let you play as many as 18-holes for the 9-hole rate.

Practice, Practice, Practice

One of the not-so-secret secrets of golf is that the short game, when your ball is within 100 yards of the hole, is where you can improve your score. It’s part of the

game where women can really excel. Our patience and attention to detail comes into play. So practicing your short game should be a priority. For busy women, it is often hard to get out to the practice range, so ask your golf pro for two or three drills that you can do at home to help build up your skill.

Reducing the Anxiety on the First Tee

Even the best players are anxious as they approach this tee. It's entirely natural. Luckily, there are things you can do to minimize your anxiety.

Arrive at the clubhouse at least a half-hour before your tee time. Give yourself enough time to get your gear together; purchase your green fee and cart rental, if you use one; and do some stretching. Try to allow for some time to practice your putting before playing. Remember that honing shot game skills is a real advantage.

In your pocket, you should have two balls, some tees, and your divot tool, which you use to repair any marks your ball makes when it lands on the green (get your pro to show you how to use this). Your golf glove should be handy, too. And remember to bring lots of water and something to eat to keep your energy up during the game, and to lather your exposed skin with a good-quality sunscreen. For many golfers, their first drive is often disappointing. Not to worry, for it's a long game and during the course of the game you'll have lots of opportunities to do it better!

Enjoy Your Time Golfing

It is normal to experience frustration while playing the game. Self-doubt and self-criticism increases stress and stress increases tension in the body, which is counter-productive. Talk yourself out of negative self-talk and thinking. Focus not on the shot you've just made (unless it is exceptional!), but on the opportunity of shots to be made. And take pleasure in being out-of-doors, active, and enjoying the company of others.

I wished I had paid more attention to some of these tips when I first started playing golf. It sure would have made me feel more comfortable in taking up the game.

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