

Golf 101: Dos and Don'ts for Beginners

Golf is the greatest game in the world—just ask anyone who plays! But getting started as a beginner can be a daunting—and often intimidating—prospect. To help you (or someone you know) take the plunge, here's a definitive list of dos and don'ts for the aspiring player.

First off:

DO: Start on a practice range, not on the golf course. The range is the perfect place to get acclimated to the game. It's low-pressure; you can stay as long as you want.

DON'T: Worry about anyone else at the range. Everyone there was once a beginner too, and we all know the game is a struggle. No one is judging you!

If you make it through your first range session and decide you like golf and want to pursue it seriously, then:

DON'T: Let your spouse or significant other become your primary teacher. This is often a recipe for disaster that could drive you away from the game (and possibly each other!).

DO: Work with a professional to get a proper swing foundation. You can find a PGA pro near you here.

But, if you are determined to craft your own swing, here are a few helpful tips. Try incorporating a couple at a time until you can do all of them seamlessly.

DO: Learn how to grip the club properly.

DON'T: Try to keep your head "down and still" through impact. Let it follow through with the rest of your body.

DO: Bend from your hips.

DON'T: Bend from your knees.

DO: Get your lead shoulder under your chin on the backswing and finish with your face, chest and hips and facing the target.

DON'T: Stay flat-footed through impact.

DO: Concentrate on the short game by chipping and putting before focusing on long irons (3-iron, 4-iron, etc.) and your hybrids, fairway woods and driver.

DO: Recruit friends to learn with you and make it an event! Golf is hard.

When it comes to purchasing equipment, golf is one of the most expensive sports in the world. But you don't have to spend a fortune right away. Start slowly and:

DO: Buy a glove. Some people like to play without one, but the vast majority of golfers use them. Plus, your uncallused palm will likely need the protection.

DON'T: Worry about buying your own equipment until you can make consistent, solid contact every time you swing.

DO: Invest in some proper golf attire. You can get some great deals at retailers like PGA Superstore.

DON'T: Buy head covers for your irons. Please. Just don't.

DON'T: Attempt to play on the course until you can get the ball airborne. This is both for your benefit and everyone else on the course.

DO: Play as quickly as possible. Always be ready to hit your shot when it's your turn.

DON'T: Take range balls to the golf course. Many are limited-flight models, so it's just not worth it.

DO: Take the time to learn basic rules and etiquette.

DON'T: Spend too much time looking for your ball, and don't pick up any other balls on the course, even if you can't see anyone. You might ruin someone else's good round.

DO: Mark your ball on the green so you can identify it.

DON'T: Use too big of a ball mark. How big is too big? Anything larger than a poker chip is probably too much.

DO: Accept invitations to join other groups. Golf is a social sport, and it's a great way to meet people.

DON'T: Mark your scorecard on or by the green. On a busy course, people will be waiting to hit their approach shots, so do it when you get to the next tee.

DO: Take care of the course by raking bunkers, replacing divots and fixing your ball marks on the green.

DO: Make it fun! Initiate putting contests and ball-striking challenges.

DON'T: Put too much pressure on them.

DO: Keep things low-key.

Finally, the most importantly:

DO: Remember the good shots and forget the bad ones.

DON'T: Get discouraged. Golf is tough, but it's so worth the effort. In the immortal words of Arnold Palmer: "Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated; it satisfies the soul and frustrates the intellect. It is at the same time rewarding and maddening—and it is without a doubt the greatest game mankind has ever invented."