



*** Please note, this document is currently under review as of July 24, 2023. It continues to provide a great departure point for individuals with disabilities interested in learning to play ...

National Alliance for Accessible Golf Player's Tool Kit



National Alliance for
Accessible Golf

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Preface

The National Alliance for Accessible Golf is non-profit organization created as a collaboration of agencies, associations, institutions, corporations and individuals committed to the inclusion of golfers with disabilities in the game of golf.

The Alliance goals are to:

- Increase persons' with disabilities understanding of the benefits of golf;
- Increase the golf industry's awareness of the benefit of serving persons with disabilities;
- Advance models and resources for persons with disabilities to learn the game of golf;
- Increase awareness of the needs of golfers with disabilities among golf course owners, teaching professionals and related personnel;
- Advance scientific understanding of the benefits of golf for persons with disabilities;
- Assist the golf industry in resolving issues related to expanding services to persons with disabilities; and
- Assemble and review technical information for golf course managers, rehabilitation and recreation professionals, and golf professionals that lead to improved inclusive services.

The National Alliance for Accessible Golf is a collaboration of agencies, associations, institutions, corporations and individuals committed to the inclusion of golfers with disabilities in the game of golf. It is incorporated in the State of Indiana and has 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. The initial Board of Directors of the Alliance included the following individuals and representatives from the following organizations:

- American Therapeutic Recreation Association
- City of Las Vegas
- Clemson University
- Club Managers Association of America
- Golf Course Superintendents Association of America
- Indiana University, National Center on Accessibility
- Ladies Professional Golf Association
- National Golf Course Owners Association
- National Recreation and Park Association/NTRS
- PGA of America
- PGA TOUR
- The First Tee
- United States Golf Association
- Clermont College
- University of Utah
- Greg Jones

This Players Toolkit is the product of much input from the organization representatives making up the Alliance Board of Directors. In addition, a special thanks is extended to Dana Dempsey and ATRA members for seeing this project through to fruition.

Game of a Lifetime

Something about this tool kit caught your attention. Maybe it is because you have been a golfer in the past and have recently experienced an injury or illness that has affected your daily functioning – not to mention your golf game. Maybe a healthcare professional has encouraged you to start playing golf as part of your rehabilitation. Maybe you were born with a medical condition that affects your daily functioning and you are looking for something fun to do in your free time – developing another leisure pursuit. Regardless of what brought you to this point in time, you are here. You may be looking at this tool kit and possibly wondering if golf is a game that you could successfully play. You are not alone. Thousands of people just like you have come to a point where they ask themselves if golf is a game they could play – or could they play it again? Our hope is that this tool kit will be useful for you to locate the resources you need to make golf a reality. Many others before you have become active golfers in spite of their medical conditions. They share both the frustrations and the joy of the game with their family, friends and fellow golfers. Let us introduce some of these golfers to you.



“This type of therapy rehabilitated my self esteem and confidence.”

Stories of Success

Gus – As a member of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, I participated in the Invasions of Normandy and Holland.

In both campaigns, I was injured. I was severely injured during the invasion of Holland from what was virtually a free fall of about 300 feet after having a heavy equipment bundle dropped on my parachute by another flight formation. I remained on the front lines for 78 days until relieved, then returned to France, then England and finally America.

A few years later, I became partially paralyzed on the right side. An operation to relieve this ensued. It allowed me to get around, however, I experienced pains down my left leg and lower back. This operation was followed by drastic abdominal and hip replacement operations.

Surgeons, both military and civilian, suggested I try golf as a therapy. A successful career as a Golf Professional and reaching the Disabled (what I like to call “Less Abled”) began, and has continued for forty years. People watching me play while in pain and limping approached me saying, “If you can do it, why not people like us?”

This type of therapy rehabilitated my self-esteem, confidence and developed a strong desire to overcome as well as strengthen my belief that I could succeed and become an effective part of family and social life.

I played in the winter Golf Tour, not well, but I played. I won the Illinois Senior Championship, have been voted Teacher of the Year, Illinois Section PGA, 1992-1993, elected to the Illinois Section PGA Hall of Fame in 1993, served as a member of the PGA of America's Disabled Committee and have received numerous other awards all as a result of my involvement in golf.

I always tell my golf students, "When you say I can't, you can't!" "All IS possible when you say it is!" "Impossible when you say it is not possible!" "It is your choice." "Give it a try!!"

Dan – Dan is a 36-handicap golfer who plays in Phoenix, Arizona. Dan is 47 years old and took up the game seven years ago when a neighbor took him to hit some golf balls. The combination of an admitted competitive personality and excessive compulsive tendencies lead Dan into a love for the game and the desire to conquer the golf swing.

Dan had the gift of sight until age 22 when he reached the stage of legal blindness. At age 24, he was totally blind – diagnosis Optic atrophy.

After Dan had tried hitting golf balls several times, he heard an interview on a local Phoenix Radio Station with a blind golfer named Joe who was sharing information about competitive golf for the blind. Dan gathered information and starting working toward competing. He played in several tournaments, finishing as high as fourth in one event. Dan eventually chose to enjoy the game without all the pressure of having to compete, and loves being able to just go out and enjoy himself in the company of friends.

Dan shares three thoughts for those who want to play golf.

First Start Small:

Hit balls at the driving range not the golf course. Take little steps because "you aren't going to know what will work." Experiment and "smell the wind and dirt."



"All IS possible when you say it is!"

"Impossible when you say it is not possible!"

"It is your choice."



Start playing on par three or short courses. "Learn to keep the pace of play and pick up the golf ball when you need to."

Second: The better guide (i.e., caddy) Dan has the better he plays. Guides need to be someone who plays golf and understands the game. Working up a routine between the guide and player is very important.

For instance, Dan's guides take his left elbow with their right hand to assist him in addressing the ball. This is a constant routine. Again you "aren't going to know what will work" so just work it out between the two of you.

Third: Read good golf books that help you feel the game and the course and the event of playing. Dan is not speaking of instructional golf books but instead books about golf "that gives one the feel for being there." One of Dan's favorite golf stories is *Miracle on the 17th Green*.

Dan would like to express to all of you who might want to play golf that in doing so you will be entering an arena filled with mostly happy, upbeat and fun people. Dan knows that positive uplifting personalities abound at the golf course.

Craig – Craig is from Baltimore, Maryland and he had a stroke in the year 2000 at the age of 36. The stroke left the right side of his body paralyzed. It also affected his speech making it a challenge to communicate with others. Prior to his stroke, he was a "sports-a-holic," and thereafter felt golf was the only sport to return to because it was easier to adapt.

Craig shared with us that golf has helped him in several ways since his stroke. "It has given me something to look forward to while I was in the rehabilitation hospital. It gave me a sense of hope. Strangely enough, since the stroke my golf swing has improved. I now have more control off the tee and my ball frequently finds the fairways. Before I would get upset and angry when I didn't perform pleasingly and now my expectations have changed. In recent times, I have learned to use golf as a vehicle to have fun."

"Since my return to golf, I have learned how to walk again and can use a standard car. I have also adapted my swing to solely using my left arm. This one-arm swing technique requires the same functions, power and control as a two-arm swing. It isn't unusual to receive comments from other golfers similar to, 'I can't believe you are doing this with one-arm'."

"It has given me something to look forward to while I was in the rehabilitation hospital. It gave me a sense of hope."

As a final point, I play golf now, because it allows me feel “normal” and it provides me the opportunity to compete against others. It’s amusing to discover that I am no longer the worst golfer.

Isabel – Like many young girls Isabel loved to dance. She had been involved in dance for 6 years until she was diagnosed with a curvature of the spine known as scoliosis. As a result of her scoliosis, Isabel wore a back brace for 2 years hoping to avoid surgery.

Disappointingly the curve in her spine worsened requiring Isabel to have spine surgery. Steel rods were placed in her back to straighten and stabilize her spine. Several of the vertebrae were fused to provide additional stability. Although the surgery was successful, Isabel did not return to dance. Thankfully she healed well from the surgery, yet Isabel’s parents noticed a change in her mood. Her parents longed to find an activity that would bring back the satisfaction she got from dancing.

One day the family received a postcard in the mail from Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children announcing a “Learn to Golf” clinic being held for their patients. “I had never thought about golf as an activity for Isabel” said Isabel’s father. He continued, “In fact, who would have thought that golf could work for someone who has a bad back?” “But I figured that since it was a program run by Scottish Rite that it would be safe for us to try it.” So early on a Saturday morning Isabel’s parents took her to the adapted junior golf clinic. There she met other children learning the basics of golf - all patients of Scottish Rite with a wide range of medical conditions.

“She took to golf right away,” explains her mother. “It was a natural transition from the discipline of dance to that of golf. Since both activities take hours of practice, patience, and perseverance, she easily made the change. Isabel continued with golf lessons and made her high school golf team. Her mother beams with pride as she explains that Isabel is the top players on the team. When asked about the future, Isabel will tell anyone that she plans to have golf be a significant part of it. While it is Isabel’s skill that makes the golf ball soar off the tee, golf is what has made her confidence level soar even further.



“I play golf now, because it allows me feel ‘normal’ and it provides me the opportunity to compete against others.”

Golf Adaptations

While it is important to understand how various disabilities or medical conditions affect a person's functioning, as it relates to golf, it has been said that the ability to play all boils down to the fundamentals of grip, stance and swing. So rather than trying to identify every form of limiting or disabling condition, we will instead focus on the challenges a golfer will need to address to successfully play. These challenges may include: mobility impairments; loss of limb function; limited strength or endurance; visual impairments; hearing impairments; and cognitive impairments. For each of these challenges we will highlight some of the adaptations or modifications used to reduce their affect on your golf game. The bottom line is that even with these challenges, you can develop the skills needed to be successful on the golf course and enjoy a rewarding experience.



Golfers with mobility impairments – For a person with a mobility impairment who wants to pursue playing golf as a new experience or to resume playing golf after a period of time has passed your timing could not be better. With the support of groups such as the National Center on Accessibility and the United States Golf Association (USGA), many golf course owners and professional staff members are becoming more aware of how they could make their facilities accessible for individuals with disabilities.

More importantly, adaptive equipment manufacturers are on the upswing. Single rider golf cars are allowing players with mobility impairments to play the game from tee to green with fewer restrictions. These lightweight vehicles with turf saver tires are approximately half the size of a standard two-seater cart and are safe on slopes and uneven terrain. Some models are adjustable for height and are equipped with support restraints that provide stability while swinging and moving. Today these cars are an important piece of equipment that offer golfers with mobility impairments access around the course – following their ball wherever it may lie.

Even with these challenges, you can develop the skills needed to be successful on the golf course.

While it is possible to use wheelchairs for playing on a course, they are very difficult to maneuver. Wheelchairs can be dangerous on slopes, oftentimes do not provide a stable base from which to swing and in most cases have to be adapted many ways. Hand brakes and armrests may interfere with the swing and the height of the seat and slant of the back may have to be modified. Unless the wheelchair has been modified so that it will not damage the course, they may not be allowed on greens and most certainly bog down in sand bunkers. Tipping over is a constant danger and maintaining the pace of play is difficult when playing from a wheelchair. Scooters can be used but tend to be dangerous in maintaining one's balance during a swing and on uneven lies. Scooters may be safely used for those individuals who play from a standing position yet need transportation from shot to shot – including to their ball on the putting green.

If one is playing from their wheelchair, adapting the rules during recreational play may be needed. For example, if your ball lands in a bunker, the Modified Rules of Golf for Golfers with Disabilities (www.usga.org/rules/disabilities/Modification-To-The-Rules-Of-Golf-For-Golfers-With-Disabilities) allow golfers with mobility impairments alternatives to playing out of the bunker. There are many such modifications that the USGA has approved to allow golfers with disabilities to compete more equitably with able-bodied players.

Check all the courses in your area for those that are making single rider cars available for player use. All advocates for accessible golf ask that you continue calling the courses until they do make cars available for all who need the assistance.

Other devices available are adaptive pieces used on the tips of canes or crutches to help with a player's balance as well as to prevent turf damage. For a comprehensive and up to date list of accessible golf products, the National Center on Accessibility (www.ncaonline.org) provides helpful information on their website. You may also wish to simply search the Internet

Golfers with loss of limb function – There are numerous reasons why someone may not have use of an arm or a weakened grip, including: hemiplegia post stroke; amputation; arthritis; spinal cord injury; head injury and neuropathy. Many golfers missing an arm or have loss functioning of an arm choose to play golf one-handed. There are various components on the market to help hold the club for such golfers including gripping aids, over-size grips, cushioned grips, shock



There are many such modifications that the USGA has approved to allow golfers with disabilities to compete more equitably with able-bodied players.



The Powerstrap by Powerglove used as a gripping aid.

absorbers and gloves. Lightweight, flexible shafts are also advantageous in generating more club head speed, resulting in longer shots.

For those players who have loss of limb functioning in their leg(s) they may choose to play from a seated position (see mobility impairments). If the player is an amputee, the number of choices in prosthetic devices to aid with mobility and the motions involved in swinging a golf club are phenomenal. Rotation is aided with torque absorbers fixed to either below knee or above knee prosthesis. New designs for prosthetic feet aid in rotation, shock absorption and adapt easily to uneven terrain. Having the prosthetist work closely with the golfer and his/her golf instructor during the process of making the prosthetic device is encouraged. It is also helpful to work with a prosthetist

that understands the motions involved in the golf swing.

Golfers with limited strength or endurance – For those experiencing reduced strength or lack of endurance, golf is still an ideal game. The movements required for golf provide exercise and stretching which may help to maintain or increase one's strength, flexibility, and endurance.

Energy conservation ideas:

- Use cart during play
- Lightweight golf shoes
- Play shorter course or par-three course
- Course management strategies
- Consider climate conditions
- Graphite or flexible shaft
- Lightweight head
- Shock absorbing insert for shaft

Golfers who are blind or have visual impairments – Given that the goal of the golf swing is to stand in one place and hit a stationary ball, golf is an ideal sport for those with visual impairments. In fact, there are several areas of playing the game where those with visual impairments are actually more adept than golfers who have good vision. For example, in many cases, individuals with visual impairments have great balance and "body awareness," allowing them to learn the "positions" of the golf swing very well. For those areas where golfers with a visual impairment are at a distinct disadvantage, the USGA's Modified Rules of Golf provide accommodations. Most importantly, blind golfers are allowed to have a coach assist them in judging distance and direction, line up their shot, determine which club they should use and a host of other functions. Many golfers with visual impairments even have their coaches tap the flagstick in the hole when they are putting and chipping to give them a better sense of how hard to hit the ball.

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There are numerous teaching techniques golf professionals employ that allow those with visual impairments to acquire the fundamentals of the game. From there, like all golfers, those with visual impairments must spend time practicing to gain a feel for how to hit shots from different stances and distances.

Golfers who are Deaf or hard of hearing – Those who have hearing do not realize how much sound plays a part in the game of golf. A person who hears can tell if the ball is hit well by the sound it makes coming off the club. Likewise sound is used when a shot hits a tree to help locate the ball. Sounds are also used to indicate the need to move to shelter for safety.

For the person who is deaf or is hard of hearing, these sound indicators are not an option. Therefore they must learn to rely upon the feel of things and stay visually alert to movements in their surroundings. Some deaf players rely upon their playing partners to help signal if someone has yelled “Fore!” or help locate their shot. Golfers with hearing impairments have reported the most helpful thing for their game was to learn to pay more attention to what’s going on around them.

Golfers with cognitive impairments – Like some of the impairments already mentioned, there could be a variety of medical conditions that contribute to cognitive impairments such as a stroke, traumatic brain injury and developmental disabilities. One key to the success of a golfer with cognitive impairments will be the golf instructor. Having an instructor who understands that all golf students are different in how they learn and therefore teaches using methods that capitalize on the student’s learning style is vital. Another key to success involves the instructor breaking down lessons into incremental segments. Simple step-by-step sequencing of information is paramount when teaching a golf student who has a cognitive impairment.



Golf Rules Scholar is a visual aid for teaching by Bob Jones.

Using methods that capitalize on the student’s learning style is vital.

The following are some important considerations when selecting a Coach or Instructor:

- Coach/Instructor should have excellent communication skills with the individual student.
- Coach/Instructor should have teaching flexibility that enables them to work with all different types of individuals.
- Coach/Instructor enthusiasm.
- Coach/Instructor patience. Ability Golfer using an EZT Golf to re-enforce movement in a fun Ball Feeder by USA Golf lesson manner.



Golfer using an EZT Golf to re-enforce movement in a fun Ball Feeder by USA Golf Products, Inc.

- Coach/Instructor motivational skills.
- Excitement for the students' accomplished goals.

Resources

Over the years, the number of resources available to a golfer with a disability has increased. This section will familiarize you with how to get involved in golf by accessing programs, instructors and equipment.

Programs – Whether you are new to the game of golf or returning to it after an injury or illness, getting involved in a golf program can help develop the skills needed on the course as well as introduce you to potential golf buddies for future play. Often times programs are a cooperative effort between hospitals/rehabilitation centers, community golf facilities, organizations that focus on disabilities or golf, or civic organization.

GAIN – Golf: Accessible and Inclusive Networks is a national program sponsored by the National Alliance for Accessible Golf. Its mission is to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to play golf and thereby enable them to rejoin the social fabric of their community. To become involved in GAIN, contact the National Alliance for Accessible Golf through their website at www.accessgolf.org.

NAGA First Swing/Learn to Golf – In 1988, the National Amputee Golf Association began providing one-or-two day clinics to bring golf professionals, physical and recreation therapists, and individuals with disabilities together to teach, learn and enjoy golf. Each year NAGA works in conjunction with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Charitable Trust and the Professional Golf Association (PGA) sponsors to provide “First Swing” seminars and “Learn to Golf” clinics nationwide. A list of dates and locations for First Swing/Learn to Golf may be found at (www.nagagolf.org/clinic1.shtml) people who are blind and those with visual impairments throughout the United States. The USBGA began a partnership with the Lions Club International (LCI) in 2001 so that programs could be offered around the country. Information on dates and program locations may be found at (www.blindgolf.com)

The programs listed above are national in scope, but work with literally hundreds of local programs and agencies around the country. The Play Golf America website (www.playgolfamerica.com) is a good resource for information on programs that serve people with disabilities.

Instructors – Regardless of how one’s physical condition affects everyday functioning, one piece of advice everyone should follow is to find a professional golf instructor who can help you learn the fundamentals. For golfers with disabilities, it is particularly important to find an instructor who understands how to adapt the fundamentals to your individual abilities. Stay away from those who insist on trying to make all students fit into the “same mold.”



To find an instructor in your area with an interest and experience in teaching golfers with disabilities, go to the Play Golf America website to find a listing and location of PGA and LPGA golf professionals who have had experience teaching people with disabilities to play golf.

If you cannot find someone listed who lives in your area, start asking around and find an instructor that teaches all students – beginners to advanced players.

Equipment – You may find yourself working together with your golf instructor and an allied health care professional to determine what type of special equipment, if any, will be needed for you to play golf. For instance questions may arise such as: What type of adapted devices or equipment is the professional suggesting you use to play? Or if a single rider golf cart is needed, which golf courses in your area have those available? While there is no single source for all the information and technology that may be available, the Internet as well as the resources/organizations listed below can be of assistance in your search.

Find an instructor who understands how to adapt the fundamentals to your individual abilities.

The information you need to get started and to continue playing golf is readily available, so please do not take “no” for an answer. Try any and all of the suggested companies, organizations and associations that we have listed for you until you get the help you need. Many pars and hours of enjoyment await those who take up the game of golf – have fun, enjoy and be persistent in your pursuit to find what you need.



Contacts

- **National Alliance for Accessible Golf:** dedicated to ensuring the opportunity for all persons with disability to fully engage in the game of golf.
www.accessgolf.org
- **PGA of America:** able to help locate golf instructors. (561) 624-8498
www.pga.com From the home page click on “Improve Your Game” then click on “Find a PGA Instructor.”
- **Play Golf America:** www.playgolfamerica.com/index.cfm?action=disability
- **Ladies Professional Golf Association:** able to help locate golf instructors.
www.lpga.com From the home page click on “Teaching & Club Pros” then click on “Find A Teacher.”
- **Professional Clubmakers Society:** dedicated to foster, promote and elevate the profession of custom club fitting, building and repair of golf clubs. The organization, with members throughout the United States, holds training sessions for members to learn how to make clubs for individuals with disabilities. They can help you find a clubmaker in your area. www.proclubmakers.org
(800) 548-6094

Many pars and hours of enjoyment await those who take up the game of golf – have fun, enjoy and be persistent in your pursuit to find what you need.



Whenever any barrier stands between you and the full rights and dignity of citizenship, we must work to remove it, in the name of simple decency and justice. The promise of the ADA...has enabled people with disabilities to enjoy much greater access to a wide range of affordable travel, recreational opportunities and life-enriching services.”

President George W. Bush, New Freedom Initiative, February 1, 2001