

Time to swing into summer

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Now that summer is officially here, you'll need these tips to enjoy your golf game. You can't use the but-I-have-to-stay-home-and-watch- Tiger excuse since he's out until 2009 after knee surgery.

Happy golfing!

--Play early or late. Don't play in the middle of the day when it's 100-plus degrees outside.

--Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.

--Watch golf sometimes. Yes, I'm aware Tiger's not playing. Pick a new favorite player and check his or her stats every week. Maybe you'll find a Rocco Mediate-type to root for when Tiger's not playing. Or, chronicle Annika Sorenstam's farewell tour.

--Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before your round. Re-apply at the turn.

--Put that left foot/leg in the cart while driving. Never understood why people dangle it out near the ground. It's an injury waiting to happen.

--Put a sheet of fabric softener in your shorts pocket (this is a recycled tip from last year). I just

put one in my golf bag moments ago since I always forget.

--Try the new golf sandals. I followed Lt. Linda A. Becker of the Lost Hills Station for a round last week and she wore them. She fielded many questions from people - including myself - who didn't think they were golf shoes. Your feet can breathe, and you won't bring home sweaty socks. Bonus!

--Teach someone else to play. You'll find out just how much you know - or don't - about the swing while teaching it.

--Practice hitting lemons in the backyard. That's how George Lopez started playing golf. I tried it Monday and couldn't break the lemon.

--Buy Wiffle balls and hit them in your backyard. No excuse that you can't get to the driving range. Or, buy a mat and hit in your house.

--Participate in match play with a friend. It's something different, and you won't have to worry about your overall score. See if you can obliterate the field like Nick Delio (Saugus High/CSUN) when he won the California Amateur last month, 7 & 5.

--This tip comes from sports editor Gene Warnick - practice your swing thoughts on the driving range, not on the course. Tune out that little voice in your head when you're playing a round and keep your mind as clear as possible.

--Stay inside and read a golf book like "Playing

a Round with the Little Pro" by Eddie Merrins or "GolfUnplugged" by Jim Apfelbaum.

--Join a golf fantasy league. You'd be surprised how much more fun it is to follow golf. Or frustrating if your players keep missing the cut.

--If it's too hot outside, you can make like one of my co-workers and watch Roger Dunn instructional DVDs. Combine with your favorite golf snack.

--Play golf indoors via video game. This was the only way my 6-year-old neighbor finally became interested in golf.

--Organize a golf outing with friends. Former Daily News golf columnist Dave Shelburne does this with 25 or so of his closest friends the Wednesday before every major. (And before The Players Championship and the Tour Championship). Entry fee is \$50, which includes green fees and cart. You get your entry fee back if you win low net, low gross or you're in the cart with low net. Plus, over lunch they have a fantasy draft for the upcoming major, with the worst net score getting the first pick.

--Have the loft, lie angle and grips checked on your clubs. And clean them.

Don't take golf too seriously. Have fun.