

## Unusual Equipment and Abnormal Use of Equipment

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In the past, a college player's chief concerns about his clubs and other equipment were to be sure that he started with no more than 14 clubs, carried enough balls and tees in his bag to complete the round and perhaps also had a glove. Today, with all the different swing aides and other devices in use for training, stretching and practice, questions often arise about which of these items a player may take with him during a round as equipment and how they may be used, if at all.

The answers to most of these questions will be found in reading Rule 14-3 [Artificial Devices, Unusual Equipment and Abnormal Use of Equipment] and pouring over the details in the corresponding Decisions found in the USGA book, Decisions on the Rules of Golf and the USGA publication, A Guide to the Rules on Clubs and Balls.

As a general rule, it is not a violation to simply carry an artificial device such as a swing trainer unless it also could be classified as a non-conforming club, which would be a violation of Rule 4-1. The breach of Rule 14-3 comes when the swing trainer is used during the round in a practice swing or practice stroke. There are exceptions for medical reasons.

Devices that may be carried but not used include alignment sticks, ear plugs to keep out sound, a calibrated wind sock, or an electronic device to analyze data collected during a round on greens in regulation, sand saves or the like. On the other hand, there are many devices that may be carried and used, such as binoculars, a compass, hand warmers, or even an electronic device to recall information published prior to the round that might include swing tips or information about the course such as yardages.

It is also permissible to use during a round a device designed for stretching, unless the device is specifically designed to be used in a golf swing and the player uses it in a practice swing or stroke, in which case there would be a violation.

One artificial device that may be carried but not used in a particular manner is one that enables a player to listen to music or a broadcast during a round. The reason for this restriction on use is that listening to music or a broadcast while making a stroke or for a prolonged period might assist the player in his play, for example, by eliminating distractions or promoting a good tempo. Thus, the use of an artificial device to listen to music or a broadcast while making a stroke or for a prolonged period of time during a stipulated round is not permitted. However, it would not be a breach for a player to listen to a device briefly, for example, to obtain the results of another sporting event or

traffic information, while walking between the putting green of one hole and the teeing ground of the next hole.

A player may not use any ordinary equipment in an abnormal way to make a stroke that counts in his score, such as placing a ball in his hand against the grip when putting or to steady himself by leaning on another club to hole a short putt on a windy day. A player may sometimes be permitted to use equipment for other than a stroke if that use is traditionally accepted, such as using a putter as a plumb-line to assist in determining the slope on a putting green. However, he may not use a bottled drink as a level as that is using equipment in an abnormal manner that is not traditionally accepted.

Certainly, any questions should be resolved before play. For instance, if you have a doubt as to whether you may tuck the shirt that you have on under your arm to “stay connected” in making a stroke, ask an official for a ruling. The correct answer is that it is permitted.

Following is an outline of essential Decisions regarding artificial devices, unusual equipment and abnormal use of equipment:

The following 24 Decisions cover the specifics of several devices. Unfortunately, the Decisions don't always state whether a device or piece of equipment is considered an artificial device or unusual equipment so it is not always possible to categorize a device when the Decision states that a violation has occurred. Therefore, a knowledgeable official must remember when use of a specific device in a particular manner during a round is not permitted.

**14-3/1 Distance Meter Attached to Golf Cart** – artificial device

**14-3/2 Pencil or Score Card Used to Assist in Gauging Distance**

Not specially marked, use traditionally accepted / Exc 2

Specially marked to gauge distance is artificial device

**14-3/3 Eyeglasses and Binoculars** – not artificial devices

**14-3/4 Compass** – use permitted to determine direction of wind or grain in greens

**14-3/5 Booklet Providing Distances Between Various Points** – artificial device but use traditionally accepted / Exc 2

**14-3/5.5 Electronic Device Providing Distances Between Various Points** – same as booklet if no measuring or distance calculating function

**14-3/6 Holding Ball Against Hand When Putting** – use of equipment in an abnormal manner

**14-3/7 Elastic Bandage for Medical Purposes**

Use for medical reasons is permitted, Exc 1

Insert thumb – use of equipment in an unusual manner

**14-3/8 Adhesive Tape Used on Hands or Glove**

Use for medical reasons [reduce blisters or skin splits] is OK

Must not be excessive [thickness must be that of standard golf glove]

Solely to aid in gripping – use of equipment in an unusual manner

**14-3/9 Club to Steady Himself** - use of equipment in an abnormal manner

**14-3/10 Training or Swing Aid During Round** – artificial device

**14-3/10.3 Rod for Alignment or as Swing Aid** –unusual equipment

**14-3/10.5 Stretching Devices** – use permitted if not designed for use in a golf swing

**14-3/11 Plumb-Line** – artificial device

**14-3/12 Club Used as Plumb-Line** - use traditionally accepted / Exc 2

**14-3/12.5 Bottled Drink Used as Level** - use of equipment in an abnormal manner

**14-3/13 Hand Warmer** - artificial device; use traditionally accepted / Exc 2

**14-3/13.5 Golf Ball Artificially Warmed** – use of ball purposely warmed during round  
with artificial device is breach

**14-3/14 Electronic Instrument Used to Find Ball** – use of ball with receiver is breach

**14-3/15 Artificial Limbs** – artificial device / Exc 1

**14-3/15.5 Swing Aid Used for Medical Reasons** – not normally allowed

**14-3/16 Electronic Devices** – some use permitted

**14-3/17 Player Listens to Music or Broadcast During Round** – restricted use

**14-3/18 Weather information Accessed on Multi-Functional Device** – accessing  
weather reports provided by a weather station is permitted