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# GOLF

## *Fitness*

**Tee Time for Your Spine**



# **GOLF FITNESS: Tee Time for Your Spine**

Did you know that golf is actually a strenuous game to play? It doesn't look it but the game actually puts a lot of pressure on a player's body, so much so that the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) classified it as dangerous to the health. And yet, golf is so unique that anyone can play it, no matter their age or physical condition. How do they manage?

The key, of course, is fitness. Anyone might be able to play golf. This is the one sport where the old and the young can play on equal keels. But if you want an easier game, good physical conditioning and fitness are what you need.

Every golfer ought to know that being physically fit is a must before each round of golf. Here you will learn about stretches, exercises, and overall fitness routines you can do in order to improve your game and protect your body (especially your back) from injuries.

But first, find out just how important exercise is to golfers and how much force you are subjecting your body to with each golf swing you make.

## **Exercise before the 'Fore!'**

A long look at back injury statistics in golf will show more clearly than anything else how this leisure sports for the gents and ladies can be as hazardous as heavy labor.

Each year, or each time the golf season closes, many golfers visit their doctor's office, complaining about injuries ranging from mild to severe. The most common type of injury that golfers seem to experience is low back pain, although wrist and shoulder injuries are occur fairly often among regular players. The

Professional Golf Association estimated that 80% of the injuries that golfers incur involve the spine.

Part of the reason why so many golfers get injured after a game may have something to do with the misconception that swinging the golf in a fairly easy manner wouldn't subject the spine to hazardous levels of compressive force. But scientists measured the compressive forces of both amateur and professional male golfers in a recent study and the results are astounding:

- Amateur golfers subject their spines to forces of 6100.08 N +or- 2413.05 N; while
- Professional golfers subject their spines to forces of 7584.52 N +or- 2422 N

Now, compare that to the NIOSH's work level recommendations using results from studies based on compressive forces resulting in disc-vertebrae failure:

- Potentially hazardous to some workers: 3400 N or more of compressive force
- Hazardous to most workers: 6400 N or more of compressive force

If golf was a job, it would set a whole new meaning to "hazardous." Going back to the study, the results show that both amateur and professional groups could, at various points in a round of golf, exert and did exert force that is over eight times their body weight on their spines.

For this reason, you need regular exercise and the assurance that you are properly stretched out before you go for the swing. Not only will good fitness overall help you improve your game it could also save your back.

## **Stretch to Loose**

Stiff backs. All manners of aches and hurts in the lower back. Sound familiar? At one time in your life or another, you may have experienced these after playing golf. This usually happens if you haven't been golfing in a while and then go on a putting spree all of a sudden, thereby shocking your back to near catharsis. But on quite a few occasions, even regular golfers suffer this kind of injury, simply because they don't bother to condition their bodies first before going for the drive.

Here are a few easy to do stretching exercises that you can do before each game of golf to reduce back pains:

### ***Seated Twist***

The aim of this stretching routine is to loosen the back muscles, thereby minimize the pain. As a side benefit, the routine can improve your backswing or follow through range of motion. And the best thing about it is that you can do it right at your own office. Here's how:

- ***Step 1:*** Grab an office chair and sit upright. Make sure that your chest is high and your back is straight.
- ***Step 2:*** Slowly reach behind you with your left arm. This movement will actually rotate your upper body. Let it.
- ***Step 3:*** Now, place your right arm on your left leg for leverage. This will create torque.

- **Step 4:** Hold this position for at least 10 seconds, then repeat.
- **Step 5:** Switch arms. Of course, this would mean that you would be rotating the opposite way. Hold for another ten seconds and repeat.

### ***Hamstring Stretch (Seated)***

This routine will stretch your hamstrings, glutes, and calf muscles while at the same time, loosen your back and minimize the pain. Again, as a side benefit, this will increase flexibility in your torso, thus improving your backswing or follow through range of motion.

Here are the steps:

- **Step 1:** Sit on your office chair facing your desk. Then, place your right foot on top of the desk.
- **Step 2:** Flex your knees slightly, then reach forward until you feel the stretch in the hamstring, lower back, and calf muscle.
- **Step 3:** As you stretch, try to maintain a straight back.
- **Step 4:** Hold this position for at least 10 seconds before repeating steps 1-4.
- **Step 5:** Switch legs and do the same.

### **Stretch to Warm Up**

Stretching to loosen aching back muscles is one thing. Stretching to warm up before a round of golf is another. You do the first after the game; you do the latter before starting for the green. The first treats the resulting injury. The second will help prevent any injury from even happening.

Dr. Larry Foster, orthopedic surgeon, wrote in his book, *Dr. Divot's Guide to Golf Injuries*, that the best approach to stretching is the head-to-toe approach. That is, you start with the neck first before you get to the muscle groups that are more seriously involved when playing golf.

Here's a brief outline of the head-to-toe approach to stretching before a game of golf:

### ***Neck Stretches***

- ***Neck Rotation*** – Turn your head all the way to your left and hold. Do the same, this time turning the opposite direction.
- ***Neck Flexion*** – Look at your toes. Stretch your neck as far down as possible so that your chin is almost touching your chest. Hold.
- ***Lateral Neck Stretch*** - Stand upright, shoulders perpendicular to the ground. Then, bend your neck to your left shoulder. Hold. Then, repeat for the right side.

### ***Shoulder and Chest Stretches***

- ***Posterior Shoulder Stretch*** – With your left hand, reach across your back so that you are touching the area between your shoulder blades. Hold

that position by grabbing the back of your left elbow with your right hand. Repeat the movement with your right.

- ***Anterior Shoulder and Chest Stretch*** – Grab your favorite golf club and hold it behind your back with both hands. Make sure your elbows are extended. Now, raise the club back away from your body. This will force you to stick your chest out. Hold.

### ***Forearm and Wrist Stretches***

- ***Forearm/Wrist Flexion*** – With your elbow locked straight, hold your left arm out in front of you. With your right hand, take your left wrist and hand and bend as far down as you can and hold. Your elbows must remain straight. Hold and repeat for the other arm.
- ***Forearm/Wrist Extension*** – Starting from the same position as above, turn your left palm up and extend the left wrist. Hold the position with your right hand.

### ***Lateral Back Stretch***

Raise both arms above your head, making sure that your elbows are locked straight. This is better done if you are holding a club (positioned perpendicular to the ground) with both hands. Keeping your pelvis steady, bend as far as left as you can and hold. Then, return to the upright position slowly and do the same to your right side.

### ***Toe Touch***

This exercise will help stretch the lower back and increase your flexibility. The initial position is similar to what you would adopt when you are about to address the golf ball: your feet are shoulder-width apart. Then, slowly bend forward with your arms stretched down, trying to touch your toes. Don't bounce.

If it hurts too much because of your bad back, you can still do this exercise safely by sitting on a bench and leaning over to touch your toes.

### **Now, Stretch to Win**

One of the most important techniques in golf is the swing. For some players, the swing is the key. For others, it ain't no golf without perfecting the swing. But even as the swing is the most basic of all golf techniques, it is also the most difficult to do, consistency-wise.

Just ask any golf pro around how hard it is to replicate a single, perfect swing. In fact, it's virtually impossible. There are just too many factors involved, the golf posture being the only one you can really exert any control over.

So if you want to improve your swing, start with your posture. Improving your golf posture can help you maintain consistency and efficiency in your swing. And with these stretching exercises to improve golf posture, you are on your way to lowering down your handicap:

### ***Spine Stretch over Ball***

All you need is a stability ball, and then follow these steps:

- Sit on the ball and roll forward so that the ball is under your lower back.

- Now, roll yourself backwards over the ball.
- Make sure that you do not bend your neck too far. Make it so that your entire back is stretched over the upper surface of the ball.
- Hold this position for 20-30 seconds before repeating.

The Spine Stretch over Ball will help relieve lower and upper back tensions as well as help gain natural lower back curvature. The effect is a higher ability to maintain a straight spine angle, which, of course, results in a bigger backswing, which means more power behind your swing so that you end up with almost effortless follow through and more consistent shots.

### ***Backswing Stretch with Club***

Wondering how Tiger Woods and all the other pros do to create maximum golf swing power? Well, there is no secret exercise but there is a stretching routine you can do to improve your flexibility.

At the onset, you need a golf club. This is the one time in golf when any club would do – iron, wood, putter, or driver. It doesn't matter.

Now, follow these steps:

- ***Step 1:*** Holding your golf club, extend your left arm to the side.
- ***Step 2:*** Take your right hand and reach across for your left. Hold the club upright on the ground with both hands.

- **Step 3:** Then lean over, dropping the most of the weight of your upper body against the club until you feel that stretch in your left shoulder.
- **Step 4:** Hold this position for at least 15 seconds before repeating. Then do the same for the opposite arm.

This exercise will help increase your range of motion in your backswing. Additionally, it will eliminate the tension in your shoulders and upper torso, allowing for a more effortless golf swing.

As with any game of golf, there are many exercise techniques you can do to improve your game. But whatever technique you have, do them as regularly as you can, not only to improve your game but also to protect yourself from injury.

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