



Dr. Paul Callaway's Golf Health and Fitness Tips

## **Keeping the Back Knee Bent Promotes Added Power and Control**

Keeping the back knee bent through the entire backswing is important for added power and accuracy. If the right knee (for a right handed golfer) straightens from its slightly bent position at address as a golfer begins the backswing then the golfer will lose the natural coil potential that would otherwise be generated into the right hip and leg.

This coiling force or 'loading' is what helps accelerate and drive the golfer's hips to the left during the downswing or 'unloading' phase of the swing and produces greater explosive power through the ball at impact.

Furthermore, if the back knee straightens during the backswing, a golfer can overswing with his/her arms and reverse pivot at the top contributing to the common swing errors during the downswing of coming over the top and casting. This outside to inside swing path and early release of the club causes a weak fade or slice so both distance and accuracy are lost.

Two commonly evaluated **physical reasons** for a golfer being unable to maintain a bent (flexed) back knee during the backswing is either hip tightness and/or weakness. If the right hip is tight and/or weak then it will not properly and completely rotate during the backswing.

Restricted hip motion causes the knee to straighten so the golfer can still make a full backswing. This straight knee compensation movement, however, prevents the proper resistive coil in the right hip at the top of the backswing and is essential in a golfer's effort to avoid the upper body from reverse pivoting during the backswing, and then transitioning to downswing with the "over the top" and casting motions that produce a slice.

Here **are two very helpful exercises** that can help golfers known to have a problem keeping their back knee bent in their backswing. The first exercise is to help improve hip rotation flexibility. It is called the “Prone Hip Rotation Stretch”.

If you are a right handed golfer and want to improve the flexibility of your right hip then:

- Start this exercise by getting on your hands and knees.
- Cross your left leg across your right leg.
- Then slowly slide your right leg back and drop down to your elbows until you begin to feel a comfortable stretch in the back of your right hip and outer thigh (see Picture 1).
- Hold this stretch for 3-5 minutes or until you feel the stretch feeling completely release in your hip.



Picture 1: Prone Hip Rotation Stretch

The next exercise is called the “Lateral Lunge and Twist”. It is an excellent strengthening exercise for the right hip and leg.

- Begin this exercise by standing in front of a full length mirror with your feet wider than shoulder width apart (3-4 feet) and bend into your golf address posture with a golf club held across the front of your shoulders.
- Maintain this starting spine angle and lunge and twist your upper body to your right until your head, left shoulder, right hip, knee and foot are all in a vertical plumbline (see Picture #2).
- Hold this position for one full breath, slowly move back to the starting position and repeat lunging and twisting to the right only for up to 2 sets of 10 repetitions.



Picture 2: Lateral Lunge and Twist

Perform both of these exercises at least once every other day for 2-3 weeks in combination with continued swing drills from your teacher and you will experience rapid gains in your ability to make a complete turn around a stable right knee.

*Paul Callaway, PT, PhD is the Director of Golf Fitness at the Cantigny Golf Academy in Wheaton, IL. He was the first Director of Physical Therapy on the PGA Tour and has specialized in golf-specific fitness training, performance enhancement and injury-prevention for the past 25 years. If you have questions for him about this article or any other topic related to golf fitness and performance, he can be reached via email at [paul@callawaygolffitness.com](mailto:paul@callawaygolffitness.com), by calling 630-567-7572 or by visiting [www.callawaygolffitness.com](http://www.callawaygolffitness.com).*