

Dr. Paul Callaway's Golf Health and Fitness Tips

## **“Warm-Up and Win”**

For years, experts in fitness and performance have agreed that, prior to every athletic activity, a proper *pre-activity* warm-up period is essential. The benefits of a stretching routine to warm-up properly for golf are equally important. Golfers who regularly spend several minutes prior to practicing and/or playing have significantly improved chances of performing better earlier in their round as well as finishing strong at the end of their round ... and, do so with less chance of injury.

The biggest challenge it seems for most golfers when it comes to consistently performing a pre-golf stretching routine is planning enough time in our schedules before our tee time. We probably have all known golfers who have raced from their home or office to make their scheduled tee time, observed them running from their car to the first tee, taking three to five full swings with their driver to get loose, saying a prayer, and then hoping that they can make contact without ripping out their lower back or shanking their drive on their very first swing. If we are always racing to catch our scheduled tee time, we will probably never adequately stretch before we play.

Therefore, realizing the benefits of consistently practicing a proper pre-golf stretching sequence could perhaps help motivate us to consistently arrive a few extra minutes before our tee time. The benefits of a good warm-up include increased flexibility for a more complete turn, improved muscular efficiency for greater power and control, extra club head speed and distance as well as the reduced injury potential.

So, what should a pre-golf warm-up consist of? There are many stretching exercises that could be included. Nevertheless, not all stretches are necessarily golf-specific. In other words, the stretching sequence of a pre-golf warm-up should always include exercises that will prepare the muscles that will be used for safe and efficient use during the golf swing.

Furthermore, a pre-golf warm-up sequence should be customized to our own physical needs. Some golfers need different exercises and/or need to perform certain stretches with special technique. Consequently, being evaluated by a golf-specific fitness specialist is recommended before starting any exercise program including a warm-up stretching routine before we play. This article will demonstrate, however, some typical pre-golf warm-up stretches that might, once properly evaluated, be included in your stretching sequence.

To begin with, a general full body warm-up should be performed for 2-3 minutes before you stretch. Simply take one or more irons and, from an upright standing position (not bent over in your golf posture) start with slow, partial swing motions gradually building to faster, full swing motions. This will help adequately increase your body temperature to prepare your golf muscles to be more specifically stretched during later stages of the warm-up sequence.

When you feel your body getting warmer and looser, and/or feel as though you are beginning to perspire, you are then probably ready to begin your golf-specific stretching sequence.

Each of the following example stretches should be **held for approximately 15-30 seconds** each while you gently hold a comfortable stretch **without bouncing or lunging** during the stretch. Each exercise should be **repeated about 3-5 repetitions** or until your body feels adequately loose. You should also **be sure to breathe** as you stretch to help your body stay fully relaxed during each stretch.

### **Squat and Reach**

The first exercise is called the “Squat and Reach” stretch. It is designed to help stretch your lower back, hips, spine, chest and shoulders. Simply hold a club vertically in front of you on the ground with both hands placed on the top of the grip, comfortably widen your stance and bend from your hips and knees as you then allow your chest to “sag” down toward the ground. Continue to reach and stretch until you feel a comfortable stretch in your lower back, hips, legs, chest, shoulders and arms (See Picture 1).



Picture 1: Squat and Reach

### **Standing Reach and Side Bends**

The second exercise is called the “Standing Reach and Side Bend” stretch. It will help increase flexibility in your chest, shoulders, hips and spine. To perform this warm-up

stretch, stand with your feet shoulder width apart and reach a club over head, slightly bend at the hips and knees while you contract your lower abdominal muscles and rotate

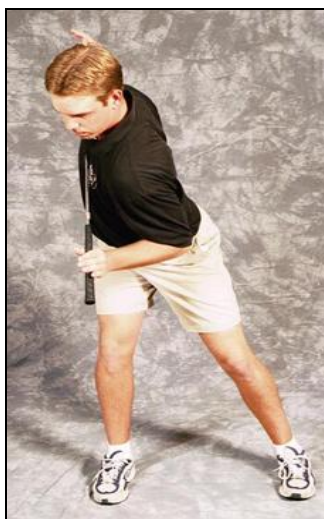
your pelvis into a neutral “tucked” position so your belt line is parallel to the floor. Then reach a club with both hands as high as possible over your head until you feel a gentle stretch in your chest and under your shoulders. Then, maintain your neutral tucked pelvis, bent hips and knees and slowly side bend to your right until you feel a comfortable stretch in your left side. Repeat this stretch several times in both directions (See Picture 2).



Picture 2: Standing Reach and Side Bend

### **Trunk Rotation Stretch**

The third stretch is called the “trunk rotation stretch”. It is designed to help warm-up the muscles of the spine and shoulders to improve your ability to make a full turn during your backswing and follow-through. To begin this stretch, start with your hips, knees and pelvis in the same position as for the previous “standing reach and side bend” exercise. Then, with a club held across the front of your chest and shoulders, slowly rotate your spine and torso as far as possible to the right (see Picture 3). Repeat this stretch several times in both directions.



Picture 3: Trunk Rotation Stretch

## **Standing Forward Lunge**

The last pre-golf warm-up stretch is called the “standing forward lunge”. It is designed to stretch the muscles and joints of your hips and legs. To perform this exercise, stand with a club held in front of you on the ground. Contract your lower abdominals and straighten your upper back simultaneously so the entire length of your spine is as long, flat and tall as possible. Then, while keeping your spine vertical, step forward with your right leg while keeping your left knee straight and your left heel down on the ground until you feel a comfortable stretch in your left calf and ankle as well as in the front of your left hip (see Picture 4). Repeat this stretch several times as previously recommended, switch legs and then repeat the stretch on the other side.



Picture 4: Standing Forward Lunge

### **Key Points to Remember:**

- A proper pre-golf warm-up can provide you with the needed flexibility to hit the ball longer, more consistently from the beginning to the end of your round and it will significantly reduce the chances of injury.
- It is strongly recommended that you find a golf fitness specialist who can assist you in the process of customizing your very own pre-golf warm-up routine.
- Plan a few extra minutes before every round to get your body ready to perform.
- This simple addition to your routine can make you a winner!

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