

[IMAGE]

Exercises to Improve Your Golf Game

By Jeffrey Tucker, DC, DACRB

The most common injury sites for golfers are the low back, shoulder, knee, elbow and wrist. Golfers who have low back pain demonstrate a decrease in range of motion for hip internal rotation on the lead leg (left leg for a right-handed golfer) and lumbar extension, and decreased activation and/or timing of the abdominal obliques, erector spinae and knee extensors.

A good golf swing uses the left side of the body as much as the right. The hips initiate movement into the ball. The feet pushing against the ground cause a ground reaction force that sequentially travels up through the hips, the trunk and finally out the arms. The most noticeable difference between pros and amateurs is trunk rotation. Trunk rotation and flexibility are enormously important in golf. Older and less skilled players tend to use less than half the trunk rotation of younger or more skilled players.

Golfers who are looking to maximize their performance and avoid and/or rehabilitate following common golf-related injuries should try these exercises in consultation with their doctor of chiropractic:

Active Warm-Up Exercises

- Bend forward at the hips to touch the fingers to the floor.
- Step into a stride position, extending the right leg (lunge).
- Lift the right arm, rotate the spine and the head – hold this pose for 10 seconds.
- Return to the stride position. With hands on the left thigh, drop the back knee toward the floor and reach both arms overhead.
- Twist the torso toward flexed front knee and hold.
- Return to the hip flexor stretch position then put both hands on the floor.
- Go to push-up position.
- Sweep the left foot across in front – sit into the stretch and hold for 10 seconds.
- Return to the push-up position.
- Step forward into a forward bend and hold.
- Sit into a deep squat with open knees.

- Lift hands overhead, stand up and bring arms back to your side.

Now repeat this on the opposite side:

- Bend forward at the hips to touch the fingers to the floor.
- Step into a stride position, extending the left leg (lunge).
- Lift the right arm - rotate the spine and the head – hold this pose for 10 seconds.
- Return to the stride position. Hands on right thigh, drop the back knee toward the floor and reach both arms overhead.
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- Lift hands overhead, stand up and bring arms back to your side.

Shoulder Exercises

The shoulder is the key anatomical structure involved in every phase of the golf swing. If you've suffered a shoulder injury related to golf or are just looking to improve shoulder rotation and performance, ask your doctor of chiropractic about these exercises:

Wing stretch: Place the back of your right hand on the outside upper gluteal (buttock) region so the elbow sticks out to the side. The back of the hand touches above your "pants pocket" area. Grab the right elbow with the left hand and pull it the elbow forward, simultaneously resisting the pull by stabilizing your shoulder girdle backward on the stretching shoulder. Hold this stretch for one minute.

Open book: Lie on your left side with your knees bent and your arms straight out in front of you, palms together. Keeping your knees on the ground, take your top arm and rotate your upper body all the way in the opposite direction. Perform 15 reps. Repeat on the other side.

Thoracic rotation: Get down on all fours, place your right hand behind your head, and point your right elbow out to the side. Brace your core and rotate your right shoulder (think about moving through the shoulder blade) toward your left arm. Follow your elbow with your eyes as you reverse the movement until your right elbow points toward the ceiling. That's one repetition. Do 20 reps right and left.

Band diagonal raise: Attach a band or handle to the low pulley of a cable station. Standing with your left side toward the pulley, grab the handle with your right hand in front of your left hip and bend your elbow slightly. Pull the handle up and across your body until your hand is over your head and your thumb is pointing up (a Statue of Liberty pose). Return to the starting position. Complete 10-15 reps and repeat with your left arm.

Scaption: Perform this exercise standing in front of a mirror to monitor their form. Hang the arms down by the thighs and rotate both hands to a thumbs-up position. Retract and depress the scapulae as you lift the arms up to shoulder-height at a 45-degree angle from the trunk. The arms should make a Y in front of them. Make sure that the upper trapezius isn't pulling the shoulders into the ears. If it is, work on pulling the shoulders down in order to push the arms up. Perform two sets of 15 reps per set.

Y-T-W-L exercises: Lie face down on a bench with your upper shoulders off the bench to perform these exercises, which involve raising the arms / shoulders to mimic the shape of a Y, T, W and L (e.g., arms up over the head forms a Y; arms straight out to the sides forms a T; etc.). Standing Y-T-W-L exercises can also be performed using a stretch strap, which allows you to maintain a consistent arm position.

One More Great Exercise

If you're suffering from increased thoracic kyphosis (rounded upper back / shoulders), protracted shoulder blades and/or forward chin position, ask your doctor of chiropractic about this corrective exercise:

- Stand, feet together, looking straight ahead. The feet should remain in this position for the duration of the exercise.
- Put one hand beneath your collarbone and one hand on your belly button. Keeping your hands in that position, lift the chest with the hand under the collarbone while simultaneously pulling down with the belly button hand. This will help to lengthen the spine and reduce the slouched position.
- Holding the achieved position, level the pelvis by raising the middle of the pelvis with the lower abdominals.

- Lengthen the neck by slightly tucking the chin and imagining the crown of the head is being pulled toward the sky.
- Bend your knees very slightly, just enough to remove any tension from the posterior knee.
- Holding the achieved position, lean forward slightly to shift the center of gravity to the midfoot instead of the heel. Practice this frequently to improve posture. This opens the chest and allows for more natural breathing as well.

While non-golfers may not realize it, the physical challenge of golf can be more daunting than the mental part of the game, particularly if you don't use proper mechanics during every part of the swing. Injuries are common, which will either affect your game dramatically or stop you from playing altogether. Talk to your chiropractor about these and other exercise strategies to improve your golf game and avoid injury.

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