

Rusty Swing & Rusty Body: **Getting Back to Golf Injury Free**

By Dr. Brandon Crouch

Getting out your golf clubs can also bring out strains, sprains, and injuries to the body. Let's think about it for a moment. The clubs have been stored away for months of hibernation. So while your brain may be more than ready to hit the links with your buddies your body may be in need of conditioning. To prevent injuries and to improve performance on the golf course warm up your body before you warm up your golf swing.

A proper warm up starts from the ground up. Your feet and legs get a lot of exercise out on the course so be sure to warm them up first. When you get to the golf course take a few minutes to walk around before jumping in your golf cart. This will get the blood flowing through your legs and allow your leg muscles to warm up. After a quick walk stretch your legs by using the following stretches:

1. **Calf Stretch:** A flexible calf muscle is important for your golf posture and for stability during your swing.
Instructions: Standing tall, grab a wall for support and step back with your left foot as far as comfortable, keeping the left leg straight. From here, try to press your left heel into the ground creating a big stretch in your left calf – gastrocnemius muscle. Hold for 15-20 seconds. Now bring your left foot closer to your right foot and bend the left knee as far as possible keeping your left heel in contact with the ground. This will stretch the left lower part of the calf – soleus muscle. Hold for 15-20 seconds. Repeat with the other leg.
2. **Iliopsoas – Hip Flexor Stretch:** The iliopsoas muscle is a strong muscle that starts in the legs and finishes in the pelvis / low back. Its strength and flexibility will directly influence your golf game.
Instructions: Standing tall, step forward with right leg. While keeping your posture tall and left leg straight, lunge forward with your waist until you feel a stretch in your left groin region. Hold for 15-20 seconds. Repeat on the other side.
3. **Hamstring Stretch:** The hamstring muscle is one of the most commonly strained muscles by athletes.
Instructions: Standing tall keep your left leg straight and place it on an object that is 1-2 feet tall (i.e. golf cart, chair). Keeping both legs straight and bending **ONLY** at the waist lean your upper body over your left leg. You should feel the stretch in your left hamstring (back of your thigh). Hold for 15-20 seconds. Repeat with both legs.

Next, focus on your low back and core. This area will get tons of work during the next few hours of golf. When properly warmed up and stretched you will get more power in your golf swing and also help to prevent injury.

1. **Helicopter – Windmill Rotational Turns:** The abdominal muscles are crucial for staying down on the ball during your downswing and help you create power as you rotate through the ball.

Instructions: Helicopter: Standing tall with your feet shoulder width apart and your arms out to your sides, begin to rotate your arms and trunk back and forth. Keep your arms up and let your whole body rotate. After a short warm up, try to stabilize your lower body (keep it still) and just rotate your upper body around your lower body. Continue turning back and forth for 30 seconds. **Windmill:** After performing the Helicopter Rotational Turns, try to stabilize your lower body (keep it still) and bend from the waist until you are in your golf posture. Continue to just rotate your upper body around your lower body like a windmill for 30 seconds.

2. **Abdominal Core Rotational Stretch:**

Instructions: Standing with your right shoulder next to a wall rotate to the right until you can place your hands on the wall. Slowly continue to walk your hands to the right until you feel a stretch through your abdominal region. Hold for 15-20 seconds. Repeat with the left shoulder.

Now you are ready to move up to your upper body. This area of the body is the link between your core and your golf club. Swinging the club 200-300 times per round can take its toll on your upper body.

1. **Big Circles - Little Circles:** These exercises have probably been programmed since childhood and are a great warm up for your shoulders.
Instructions: Standing with your arms to your sides make large circles with your arms first frontward for 20 seconds and then backward for 20 seconds. Next continue the same exercise but by making smaller circles. Repeat for 20 seconds in each direction.
2. **Standing Prayer Stretch:** This exercise will really target your shoulders and your latissimus dorsi muscles (lats). The lats are instrumental in allowing for good shoulder and arm flexibility.
Instructions: While standing grab onto a golf cart or pole about head high. Sit back into your heels bending at the waist until you get a big stretch in your shoulders and lats. Hold for two breathes and then come back up. Repeat 5-6 times.

Lastly, warm up your neck. An often overlooked area of the spine that allows a golfer to rotate freely is the neck. The less mobility in the neck the less rotation a golfer will have during their swing.

1. **Neck Circles:** This is a good exercise to warm up all the muscles of the neck.
Instructions: While sitting rotate your neck around clockwise 5 times and then repeat counter-clockwise.
2. **Neck Range of Motion Stretch:** After warming up your neck muscles this stretch will target your neck extensor, flexor, and rotational muscle groups.

Instructions: (Hold all 6 positions for 7-10 seconds each.)

Flexion and Extension: While sitting, using your hand gently pull your head forward bringing your chin to your chest. This will stretch your upper back and the back of the neck. Next lift your chin and push gently on the forehead until you feel a gentle stretch in your front neck muscles.

Left and Right Rotation: While sitting, rotate your head to the right while gently pushing on the left side of your face. This will create a gentle stretch. Repeat to the left.

Left and Right Lateral Flexion: While sitting, bring your right ear to your right shoulder. Using your right hand reach over and pull on your head gently to continue bringing your head in this direction. You should feel a stretch through your neck and left shoulder. Repeat on the other side.

Warming up and properly stretching before your golf game is more than injury prevention. You will never see an athlete before competition just show up and compete without warming up. Why? They know that when their muscles are warm and stretched they will perform better and get the most out of their body. Follow their lead and get the most out of your body and your golf game.

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