



## **Fitness Tips For Golfers**

Backs are to golf what knees are to football... the longer one plays either sport, the greater the chance for a specialized injury.

In fact, statistics show that 80% of all injuries on the PGA and LPGA tours are to the back. Combine that with the fact that 80% of all adults suffer back pain, and the risk for golfers-recreational as well as the serious variety-vaults from critical to extreme.

Lack of muscle strength, muscle endurance and flexibility head the culprit list. Factor in the hours of repetitive motion (often performed improperly), and it's a tribute to one's love of the game-and perseverance-that more bags, woods, and short irons don't show up at garage sales every spring.

### **Help is Now Available**

Aging may be inevitable, but thanks to modern science it now can be endured with dignity and accommodation. And golf happens to be an aging-friendly activity-if approached properly and shown a little respect.

A program adapted by the University of California (Berkeley) Health Services is helping golfers of all ages to improve their skills and gain more enjoyment from their sport. By following the program, players can swing with more accuracy and consistency, hit longer drives, and reduce fatigue and injuries. Recommendations by the Berkeley experts include:

### **Establish A Walking Program**

Wear shoes that have good support and begin a regular walking routine to include at least 30 minutes most days of the week. Work up to a comfortable pace and swing your arms in a controlled fashion. Try walking uphill and downhill to diversify your routine. Then stretch for 5-10 minutes after walking to keep your muscles from tightening.

### **Warm-Up Exercises**

**Knee to Chest:** Stand and face a bench. Put your right foot on the seat of the bench and lean forward, bringing your chest toward your right knee. Hold for 20 seconds. Do five times and repeat with other leg.

**Back Arch:** Stand placing your hands at the back of your pelvis. Gently lean backward, allowing your back to arch as far as comfortable and your knees to flex slightly. Next, arch your back and twist slightly to the right; then slightly to the left. During your back swing and follow-through, limit the extent to which you arch your lower back in this exercise to avoid injury.

**Neck Movements:** Stand with your feet apart, lower abdominal muscles firm and upper back straight. Keep your shoulders facing forward and turn your head first to the left and then to the right. Repeat the movement five times. Move your head to look down and repeat exercise five times. Then move your head sideways to bring your left ear toward your left shoulder. Follow this movement to the right side and repeat exercise five times.

**Shoulder Stretch:** Stand with your feet apart. Hold your club horizontally. Raise your arms overhead 5-10 times. Do not arch your lower back to bring the club higher. Then raise your arms

to shoulder height and move your arms across your chest to the right and to the left, five repetitions each way. (Do not turn your body or your head.)

**Rotation:** With feet and kneecaps facing forward, hold your club horizontally in both hands and bring it to shoulder level. Slowly rotate your upper body toward the right and follow the movement through to your left. Repeat the exercise five times.

**Side Bends:** Stand with your feet apart and lower abdominal muscles firm. Hold your club overhead and bend from side to side. Repeat five times.

### **Fitness Value Recognized by Pros**

Nancy Chan, a California physical therapist who specializes in golf fitness, believes physical conditioning is every bit as important as equipment and mental focus.

"If taking golf lessons and buying the best equipment doesn't help your game, you may want to look at your body," Chan says. "The body is the best piece of equipment you've got."

Like her Berkeley counterparts, Chan stresses posture, balance, strength, flexibility, and conditioning. "But exercise should never be painful," she says. "And you should keep it simple and set realistic goals." At the same time, many of today's most successful touring pros have taken conditioning to the next level. David Duval and Tiger Woods head a prestigious list of professional golfers who employ strength and conditioning coaches full time. Two of the longest drivers in the game, both men understand the importance of maintaining strong and flexible bodies.

"The development of strength and power comes from your movement patterns," Chan explains. "The lower back transfers the power to the hips, but without flexibility and muscular distribution throughout the body, your back and shoulders are an injury waiting to happen."

For other great golf tips please go to [www.golf101.com](http://www.golf101.com) for everything you need to know about beginner golf.