

Golf Specific Strength & Conditioning

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The beginning of winter may not seem like the time to include a golf article, however, now is the perfect time to get started on an off-season program. Golf has long been a sport that has ignored the benefits of physical fitness training. One only needs to look at Tiger Woods to see the necessity of such training and how it can improve performance and decrease injury. An understanding of how the body works, and how the systems of the body complement each other are keys to the development of a successful training program for the golf athlete. Although there are many concepts that must be considered and included in a golf training program, the four fundamental components are *posture, core strength, balance, and flexibility*. Any program that does not consider these components and their interrelations will fail to achieve the desired effects. Conversely, a successful program will prevent injury, increase mental toughness and, most importantly, train the body to better perform the golf swing.

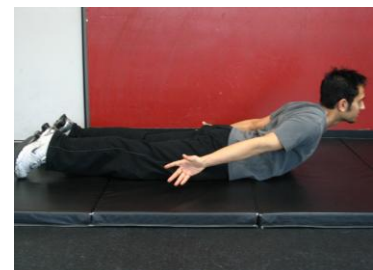
Golf training must incorporate functional movements that challenge balance, improve posture, and activate the core. A Strength and Conditioning Specialist can help you understand what needs to be trained and how to efficiently target deficiencies. This training will help any golf athlete to reach the next level. The off-season is the perfect time to get started. Too many people wait until the golf season has already begun, but starting now will ensure your best results.

All movements must develop and support good **posture**. Posture is important statically, while at the position of address, but also dynamically throughout the swing. Maintaining good posture will improve consistency at impact, shot accuracy, and distance. Postural issues with golfers tend to be expansive. Any sport that has the athlete rotate in one direction will often have implications with their spine, pelvis, and shoulders. For golfers, a particular problem is muscular balance in the shoulders. As a result of the hitting motion, most right-handed players, during impact with the ball, will shrug their left shoulder. This can result in an elevated left shoulder and an adducted (pulled medially towards the spine) left shoulder blade. From experience, I've seen these changes in golfers as young as eight years of age. Golfers also commonly demonstrate shoulders rotated out of alignment with their pelvis. Again, this is compensation from a unilateral sport. Similar to hockey players, most golfers have anteriorly rotated shoulders. Most people need to work on their posture, but when you have people playing a sport that carries their implement in front of their bodies it becomes that much more important. Although golf pros often work to improve player's posture during technical sessions on the driving range or in the video room, a specific, more comprehensive training program is usually required to change the musculoskeletal systems that control the body. The results will increase a golfer's power, balance, and efficiency of movement, ultimately leading to improved shot consistency.

SAMPLE EXERCISE:

Prone Cobra

- Lie prone with palms facing down
- Pull belly button up and away from floor
- Keep toes on ground and lift up chest
- Turn out hands away from body
- 3 sets x 1 minute

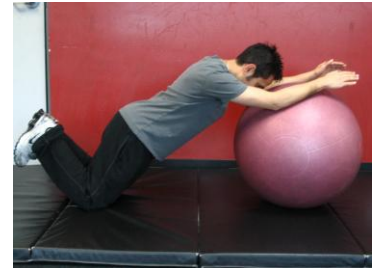


Core strength must also be a major focus of any successful golf training program, as recruitment of the core muscles is an integral part of every swing. The core encompasses more than just the abdominal and low back muscles; it is part of a complex muscular sling system that helps to initiate, stabilize, and propel our bodies through every possible movement pattern. A Strength and Conditioning Specialist can help you better understand and apply core training with the aspects of stabilization or mobilization in mind. The job of the core is to also “support spinal joints and protect joint structures from repetitive micro trauma, [in order to] prevent recurrent pain and degenerative changes” (Lee & Smith, 1999). In other words, in addition to creating power, your core will also protect your body from the rigours of the sport you’re training for.

SAMPLE EXERCISE:

Prayer

- Start kneeling with hands on the front edge of a Swiss Ball
- Pull toes up towards shins
- Set core
- Pull shoulder blades down and back
- Roll out only as far as you can feeling the abdominals work
- You shouldn’t feel the lower back working
- 3 sets x 12-15 reps

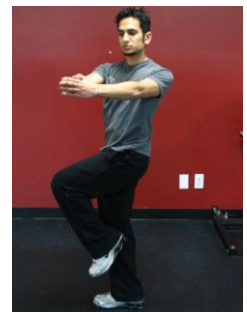


To develop **balance** requires constant sensory feedback from the body. It must challenge the body at various angles, intensities and durations. Only when this system is effectively trained can one maintain the centre of balance within the base of support. Stabilizing activities demand that the athlete gain and maintain their equilibrium in relation to the force of gravity. This ability will increase the athlete’s probability of success by allowing the athlete to fully utilize their strength for sport specific power.

SAMPLE EXERCISE:

Weight Shift

- Stand on one leg holding a slight bend in the knee
- Keep posture tall with shoulders set down and back
- Try to keep hips still
- Rotate arms side to side
- Level 1 – keep head forward, Level 2 – turn head in the direction of your hands, Level 3 – keep eyes on hands, Level 4 – close eyes



The last major focus must be **flexibility**. Proper flexibility through the trunk will allow for optimal trunk rotation and greater club head speed. “Only with good flexibility, can the trunk rotate properly, and the right side of the body keep the club moving down the target line” (Sean Richardson, CPGA Director of Instruction at Predator Ridge). Areas of focus include the shoulders, gluteals, hip flexors, hamstrings, lower and upper back. Dynamic stretching should take place following a warm-up, where each stretch is held for a 2-3 second pause. These stretches are aimed at increasing core temperature while improving muscular flexibility in a safe manner during the warm-up. For sample dynamic stretches check out <http://www.performanceforsport.com/DynamicFlexibility.html>. Following your practice, game, or work-out, stretches should be static in nature, including various stretches to be held at 30-40% intensity for one minute. The best rule of thumb is, find out what needs stretching and focus on your areas of weakness.