

Pre Game Warm Ups

“Pre game” warm ups are built in to the routine of all team sports and you won’t find many people within individual sports such as golf who don’t have a warm up routine of their own, especially among professionals. Not everyone is a professional, of course, but **for optimal preparation and performance, a comprehensive warm up needs to be a part of every golfer’s routine.** Warm up prepares the body for activity by promoting more efficient movement patterns through increased flexibility and blood flow. Proper warm up helps tune the neuromuscular system, optimizing muscle force production (aka strength and power), coordination and **reinforces proper movement patterns** specific to the golf swing. Sufficient preparation also reduces the risk of injury.

All warm up routines should include both static and active stretching techniques. Static stretching is a passive stretch technique that requires you to relax the area being stretched in order to achieve a greater range of motion. Active stretching involves movement that utilizes and enhances the flexibility gained from the static stretches, increases body temperature and reinforces movement patterns specific to golf. Each technique compliments the other and serves to prepare your body and mind for optimal performance. You want to feel as prepared on the first tee as you do on the 6th, twelfth and eighteenth tees. I recommend a minimum of 20 – 30 minutes warming up prior to stepping into the first tee box.

Note: When performing static stretches, consciously relax the area you are stretching and as much of the body as possible. **Hold** the stretch for 10-20 seconds (no bouncing) and feel for a mild to moderate stretch sensation; the intensity of this stretch sensation should stay constant or ease. If the intensity or sensation of the stretch increases as you’re holding the stretch, you’re being too aggressive and you need to back off. This is called the ‘subsiding tension principle’. Follow this simple rule and you can stretch any time, “warm” or “cold” without risk of injury. Pain should not be a part of any stretching program. If you have persistent pain during a stretch, stop. Stretching an “injured” area may do more harm than good. This one reason why a golf conditioning program, or any conditioning program, should be preceded by an individual assessment: everybody is different and has different strengths, weaknesses, abilities and histories. The best program is a customized program.

The following is a list of some key areas to target in your warm up routine. Your body will tighten up after you practice or play so be sure to stretch again in order to restore optimal muscle length and balance.

- Neck: you need optimal rotation to keep your head relatively still and your eyes on the ball during trunk and shoulder rotation away and through the ball
- Shoulders: for takeaway, full turn and follow through; restrictions will alter the swing plane and increase stress in the back, neck and hips
- Upper Back and Chest: both allow for a power generating full shoulder turn and if tight, will restrict your turn and alter your posture during the swing
- Trunk: sufficient separation between your shoulders and hips promotes a full turn away and through the ball to helping maintain a stable base while generating power with accuracy with full swings and feel and accuracy with the short irons and shots where you want to make a shoulder turn yet keep the hips quiet. Sufficient trunk flexibility also helps maintain your posture throughout the swing
- Hamstrings and Hips: the hamstrings influence multiple areas, helping maintain posture in the knees, hips and back. Flexibility in the hips assist with adequate rotation over a firm base of support
- Calves: helps maintain posture in the ankles and knees

Examples of active warm ups

- Arm Circles: stand tall with your chest out, shoulders back and belly button pulled in to the spine, feeling as if you are elongating your spine and upper body. Lift your arms out to your side and over your head and reach to the sky. Pause for 5 seconds and slowly bring your arms to the horizontal position, palm facing upwards and move your arms in circles 10 times forward and ten times backwards while maintaining a tall posture. Side bend 3x to each side when reaching to the sky to add a lat stretch.

- **Squats:** holding a 5 iron behind your neck and resting on your shoulders, stand with your feet shoulder width apart and brace your abs in a neutral spine posture. Keeping your weight over the mid foot to heel portion of your feet, squat to 60-90 degrees, return to standing and repeat. Your upper body will lean forward a bit to maintain your balance but be sure to bend at the hips and not your back. You should feel your gluts, quads and hamstrings working. This is a great multi area warm up targeting your ankles, knees, hips, and back.
- **Trunk Rotation:** holding a club across your chest with arms crossed, brace your abs, assume your address position and rotate to the right and left maintaining a comfortable range of motion. **Keep you hips and your head still, shift your weight and maintain your posture as you would during the golf swing.** Complete 15 repetitions and progress the ROM.
- **Practice Swings:** grab your 5 iron, brace your abs and assume the address position. Utilizing a half swing with 25% - 50% effort, swing back and through without stopping, concentrating on **proper weight shift, posture, head alignment and release; try to feel relaxed and fluid.** Repeat 10 reps and progress to a 75% effort 10 times. Repeat the progression with a full swing, pause, and then repeat using 5 wood then driver. Now you are ready to start hitting balls. Start with a wedge and work up to driver. I like to start this warm up with a mid to long iron vs. a shorter iron because you're in a more spine friendly upright posture to start an active rotation movement.

These are just a few warm up techniques to help sharpen your game. Allow an extra 20 to 30 minutes at least for proper warm up and you will feel better, score better and likely reduce some aches and pains. Remember, you want to feel as prepared on the first tee as you do on the 6th, twelfth and eighteenth tees. Find a routine that works best for you and make it practical so you will do it. Whenever possible, consult an experienced professional who can customize a golf specific program that addresses your individual needs and goals.

John Hinds is a licensed Physical Therapist and lifelong golfer who specializes in Golf Conditioning, Orthopedic Rehabilitation and Injury Prevention. He is included among the Titleist Performance Institute's Approved Fitness Professionals.