

Flexibility and the Golf Swing

Golf is an athletic, physically demanding game that requires optimal flexibility, strength, balance, skill, and coordination. Flexibility and strength provide the building blocks for the development of stability, balance, coordination and skill and are an important part of any comprehensive sports conditioning program, including golf. No matter your age or ability, proper conditioning will enable you to take advantage of your lessons, time spent on the range and reduces your risk of injury.

There is an optimum range of motion or flexibility necessary to swing the club around your body while maintaining your posture and keeping your eyes on the ball. Our body is a long 'chain' made up of many 'links'. If there are restrictions (or weaknesses) within and/or between the links then other links are forced to compensate. The more compensations or restrictions there are in a movement, the more inefficient that movement is, the more power we lose and the greater the risk of injury. Your neck, shoulders, back, hips, knees, ankles, and all soft tissue in between are involved in the golf swing and need to move freely to reduce compensatory movements. Optimal flexibility makes it easier to maintain our posture and our axis of rotation to keep the club on the proper path for square contact. In a nut shell, flexibility promotes a more consistent, efficient and powerful swing by:

a. Reducing unwanted compensations. Compensation in this case is when one part of your body has to stretch further because of a restriction in another. This increases stress on the areas above and below the area of restriction and can result in injury. For example: restricted hip motion causes excessive (compensatory) spinal rotation and/or shoulder movement and vice versa. And if the hips, back and shoulders are tight, excessive head, arm and/or wrist movement occurs, all of which can alter the swing plane, posture and cause injury in those areas.

b. Helping maintain your posture throughout the swing. If you are unable to maintain your spine angles and other postures created at the ankles, knees, hips and trunk, the swing plane will be lost and a miss hit likely.

c. Promoting a full, unrestricted shoulder turn. The bigger and more controlled your shoulder turn, the more power (and distance) you generate.

Not to be overlooked is body awareness and the communication that takes place between the muscles, tendons, joints and the brain that helps fine tune our movement patterns. There are 'sensors' in muscles, tendons and joints that communicate body position, direction and rate of movement to our brain which then provides immediate feedback to alter a movement if necessary. When movement is restricted this communication is less than optimal and performance can be compromised.

How do we become more flexible? Stretch. Plain and simple. Much has been written on the subject of stretching, some promoting and others dismissing. I have yet to meet anybody, let alone an athlete, who has told me that stretching impedes their performance or doesn't feel good. Different activities have different physical requirements and will have different flexibility or warm up needs. The bottom line is that the body moves more efficiently when the movement requirements of a particular activity are unrestricted.

As we age, stretching becomes even more important for reducing injury, especially in a movement as dynamic as the golf swing. Whether you apply "static" or "dynamic" stretching techniques into your conditioning program, (I incorporate both with my clients) there is no better way to improve your movement efficiency and become more flexible than by stretching. If stretching is not already part of your golf program, start now. It's cheap, easy, doesn't require any equipment and it will improve your ball striking and prevent injury. So before you hit balls on the range or tee it up, stretch. Old or current injuries, especially those involving the spine, need to be taken into consideration so consult a sports specialist to design the right flexibility program for you.