

Stretch and Swing

SIMPLE WINTER WORKOUT MAINTAINS AND IMPROVES FLEXIBILITY

Karen Palacios-Jansen | Illustrations by Kevin Fales

Winter doesn't necessarily mean you have to hang up the clubs. But even if the cold weather keeps you indoors, there are ways to maintain and improve your flexibility — and make sure your body doesn't have to re-learn the swing once spring rolls around.

Your body is the most important piece of equipment you own. Improving your flexibility helps prevent injuries and also improves your ball-striking ability.

A stretching program takes only 10 to 15 minutes, and should be done most days of the week. A basic program can contain three simple components — a warm-up, a body stretch and a specific golf muscle stretch.

GETTING PROPERLY 'WARMED'

Many people mistakenly think stretching is a warm-up. You should warm up muscles and joints *before* you stretch. To increase your blood flow, which brings needed oxygen to muscles and joints, you can jog in place, do jumping jacks or take a brisk walk. I like to swing two clubs gently back and forth, gradually increasing the pace. For younger players, the ideal is to break a sweat; for older golfers, it's to become slightly winded.



Fig. 1: Stretching increases your shoulder turn.

INCREASE YOUR SHOULDER TURN

Stretching improves the flexibility of the muscles and joints necessary for a smooth, rhythmic golf swing. A complete program should include stretches for your legs, back, shoulders and arms. One of my favorite stretches is a simple way to help increase your shoulder turn — and help your everyday posture:

Standing straight, hold a golf club behind your back with your left arm above your head and the left palm facing toward you. Put your right arm behind your back with the right palm facing out (figure 1). Hold this position for 30 seconds. You should feel a stretch in your shoulders, back and chest. Switch arm positions and repeat.

A 'SIMULATED SWING' STRETCH

For stretching to be beneficial to your game, you should simulate the golf swing as much as possible. I cringe when I see golfers put a club behind their shoulders blades and start twisting back and forth. This may feel good, but it has no real benefit. Here's a stretch to help improve your extension on the backswing and follow-through:

Take your normal golf stance and hold



Fig. 2: Turn back as if you were swinging.

the club horizontally in front of you with your left palm facing down on the grip end, and your right palm facing up near the club head. Turn back as if you were making a golf swing (figure 2). Be conscious that you are in a golf posture: Stay bent over and watch an imaginary ball on the ground. Extend your arms and hold this position for 30 seconds. You should feel a nice stretch in your shoulders and back.

Slowly follow-through to the finish and feel your right forearm rotate over the left forearm (figure 3). Yes, this is how you should release the club through impact. Most high-handicappers never let the left arm fold down — resulting in a slice. Hold the finish for 30 seconds, and imagine the ball flying straight down the fairway as you feel the stretch in your mid-section.

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Fig. 3: Slowly follow through until the finish.