

Be Fabulous

By Dr. David A. Berv

PHOTOS BY SCOTT K. BROWN

Stay in golf shape this offseason and be better than ever by focusing on flexibility, agility, balance and strength

Any avid golfer would agree that physical conditioning is instrumental to better play, fewer injuries and a longer golfing career. However, many individuals are unsure where and how to start an appropriate program; the contents of this article are a great starting point.

The following golf-specific conditioning recommendations will easily and time-efficiently integrate into your existing exercise program or schedule. What's unique to the following routines is that they are all done in standing positions – like the golf swing. Oftentimes, equipment found at a gym is not useful for golf fitness training.

Furthermore, each exercise has a widespread effect on the body in regard to balance, posture and flexibility. The swing and striking action requires you to balance, rotate, stabilize and keep your posture. Why not train with the same physical multitasking intention?

Try these exercises at home, at the office or at the gym starting at par and then moving on to birdie – then impress your friends on the links.

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FLEXIBILITY

A relaxed, fluid swing is dependent upon a flexible lower body, hips and torso. Increase your club-head speed by incorporating these exercises.

PAR SINGLE-LEG EXTENSION

Start from a standing position with a “tall spine” and both feet on the ground. Bend at your hips without hunching your upper back. Keep your back horizontal to the ground. Now, grab onto a chair or steady object. Extend one leg behind you, until a strong stretch is felt in the back of the standing leg. Hold for 15-30 seconds and keep breathing. Repeat with the other leg.

CHAIR DIP

Take a full step forward, cross one leg over the other and with steady postural control (no slouching) sit back onto the standing leg to feel a stretch in the non-standing glute region. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Repeat on the other leg. Add a level of difficulty by holding onto two golf clubs rather than a steady object.





BIRDIE THE BODY FAN

Stand with a “tall spine” and assume an exaggerated golf posture with the feet shoulder width and the arms extended at shoulder height. Remain in this posture, rotate your torso, arms and head as a unit from side to side 10-12 times in each direction, using a tempo similar to your golf swing. Control your breathing in and out. Narrow your stance to increase the physical demand.

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AGILITY

One of the cornerstones of an efficient golf swing is agility. You must rotate, have sound upper/lower body separation and move from side to side all while trying to keep a stable posture. Sound easy? It can be with the following exercises that also promote stamina and can increase your accuracy by keeping you in the most efficient golf positions. The last thing you want is to start wearing down at the end of a round.

PAR TORSO ROTATION

Stand with a “tall spine,” with your arms crossed over your chest. Keep your lower extremity quiet, while rotating only the torso and head left to right, 10-12 times. Breathe in and out. In order to get the most out of this drill, your belt buckle should remain pointing straight ahead.



BIRDIE

BALANCED TORSO ROTATION

Add a layer of difficulty by standing on an unstable device, such as some balance discs (find the discs at Dick's Sporting Goods or online at www.powersystems.com or www.performbetter.com). Again, try moving the torso only to the left and right while stabilizing the lower body.



PAR

LATERAL LUNGES

Start with a "tall spine," with your feet together and arms across your chest. Bend your knees like you would at address. Remaining at the same height, lift and place your left foot over to about shoulder width. Without bobbing your head, anchor your left foot, then lift and place your right foot aside the left. It's crucial not to dip down, so be conscious of staying level. Repeat 10-12 times and control your breathing.



BIRDIE

WEIGHTED LATERAL LUNGES

Add a new dimension by holding a weighted ball (3-5 lbs.) at arms-length and perform the same lateral lunging motion.

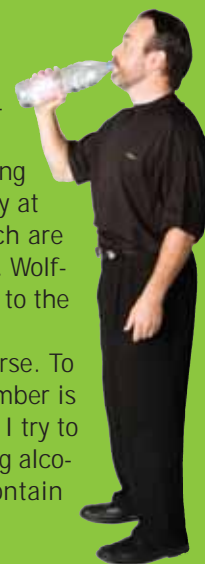


Maintain the Proper Diet

The two most important dietary concepts to remember on and off the course are controlling your blood sugar and staying hydrated.

As such, it is just as important to monitor *what* you eat and drink, as it is *when* you eat. Bring snacks with you on the course and eat small portions every one or two hours – or minimally at the turn. Nuts, fruit, protein power bars, vacuum packed tuna and chicken packets, which are readily available at your supermarket, are popular and energetic choices. Input equals output. Wolfing down a hot dog, chips and a carbonated drink at the turn is a little like bringing a shovel to the tee of a long par 5.

Dehydration is the primary reason for fatigue and resultant inconsistent play on the course. To calculate how much water you should be drinking, take one-half your body weight; this number is the equivalent in ounces of water you should be drinking each day. I weigh 170 pounds, so I try to drink 85 ounces of water a day. Sip water throughout your round, especially if you are drinking alcohol and caffeine which are dehydrating. Use "energy drinks" sparingly, as they often contain excess sugar.



BALANCE

Maintaining balance throughout your golf swing is crucial in ensuring proper weight shift, postural control, coordination and timing. Build a more powerful swing and achieve balance by doing stabilization drills that affect your ankles, thighs, calves and glutes.

PAR

ONE-LEGGED BALANCE

Begin with a “tall spine,” with both feet on the ground and arms across your chest. Slowly transfer all your weight to one leg, lifting the non-weight bearing leg off the ground. Hold for 10 seconds and remember to breathe.



ONE-LEGGED HOPS

Take 8-10 small hops on each leg, re-establishing your balance when making ground contact.

BIRDIE

BALANCE ON AN UNSTABLE OBJECT

Holding a club, balance on one leg and place the other leg behind you. Maintaining a “tall spine” and good postural control, make some abbreviated waist-high to waist-high swings. Bump up the demand of the exercise by getting on an unstable object, such as a balance disc.



Remain “At Attention”

Monitoring a good posture during daily activities can have a profound impact on your golf game. In particular, while driving, keep your head and upper back against the headrest and car seat; don’t hunch toward the wheel. Practiced over time, this will help to minimize poor address postures.



STRENGTH

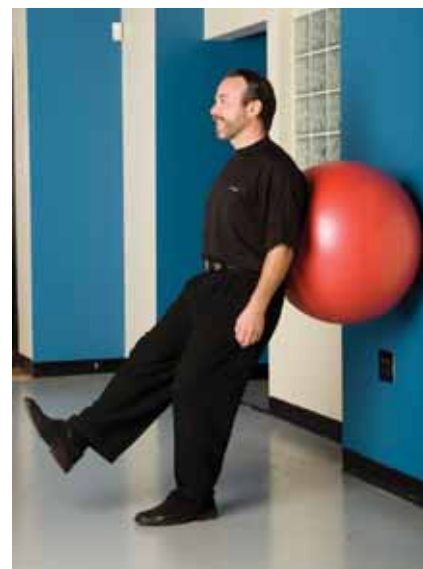
Core and leg strength assist power transfer, proper postural stability and synchronization from the lower body to your torso. It also helps you minimize fatigue in your golf postures which decreases the tendency to be just an upper body golfer.

PAR

ABDOMINAL STRENGTHENER

Begin with a 'tall spine' and hold a club for balance in one hand. Place the other hand behind your head.

With a controlled, fluid movement, attempt to touch your elbow to the opposite knee, employing a twisting motion. Perform 8-10 repetitions on each side and exhale. It's not as easy as it looks, but when done correctly, this exercise will work the abdominal muscles and back.



BIRDIE

WALL SQUATS

Begin with your back against a wall or a ball. Keep a slight bend in your knees and slowly transition into a squat position, where your knees are parallel to the ground. If this position is too strenuous, reduce the degree of your squat.

You can either do 8-10 repetitions of up and down squatting or hold your squat position as long as you can until fatigue – this may be 20 seconds or two minutes. Either way, in the long run, this motion will help you escape thick rough...on the few occasions you miss the fairway.

For an additional challenge, you can perform the same squatting action through a range of motion or holding steady with only one leg.

Head Strong

A word about mental acuteness: Staying mentally focused can be positively or adversely influenced by your physical golf performance. It's oft-repeated but bears repeating: Exercise is good for you. Working on your body in a golf-specific way will have large payoffs for your mind.

Feeling Ambitious?

Had enough yet? If the answer is a definitive "no," then the following exercises are well worth including in an advanced routine. They should only be attempted, though, until after the aforementioned motions have been performed on a consistent basis and mastered.

WEIGHTED SQUATS ON BALANCE DISCS

Holding a weighted object, ball or just your hands at length, carefully step onto a pair of balance discs.

Establish your balance and stand tall with a slight bend in your knees. Slowly squat, exhale and return to the standing position while holding your arms at length. Perform 8-10 repetitions and breathe.



BALANCE ON AN UNSTABLE OBJECT

Get close to a stable area like a wall. While holding onto a steady object, climb on top of an exercise ball. The shoelace part of your shoes should be touching the back of the ball for control. Stand tall and attempt to balance for as long as possible with your arms crossed over your chest or out to your sides.

LATERAL LUNGES ON BALANCE DISCS

Place two balance discs on the floor at shoulder width. Stand with both feet on one of the discs with a slight bend in your knees and with your arms across your chest. Remaining at a constant height and without bobbing your head up and down, bring the left foot over to the other disc and re-establish balance. Continue this action by bringing the right foot to meet the left foot, ending up with both feet on one disc again. Repeat several times.



Your Schedule

Implementing these exercise routines on a weekly basis should be easy and time-efficient. Pick three days of the week such as Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Start with the basic (par) exercises in each category and build up over weeks or months to try some of the more challenging (birdie) exercises. Work at your own pace; don't let anyone define success for you. A series should only take about 10 minutes. Many of these can also be done on "game day," such as one-legged swings, the body fan and single-leg extensions as well as chair-dip style lower extremity stretches.

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