



GOLF FITNESS

Make a full backswing, cheat injury and energise your limbs with top physio Bob Wood

Bob says: There's a saying in physical training - from length you get strength. Longer muscles have more scope for power. But there's a second saying - if you don't use it, you lose it. Our often sedentary lifestyle means we rarely ask muscle groups to perform to their capacity. That can cause swing problems. Take the Latissimus muscle, under your shoulder. Your Lats link your spine to your shoulder. If the muscle is short, your shoulder can't make the full, turning motion you see here. That wonderful Ernie Els-like, top-of-the-backswing position you see yourself trying to make is doomed before you start. You'll end up having to make some nasty compensatory moves to get the club back to the top. The two most common are:
+Bending your left arm. When your shoulder won't budge any further your arms must buckle to lift the club onward.
+ Arching your low back. If short lats tie up your shoulders your brain's full-turn demand re-routes to your low spine. You can move the club back after a fashion by arching your lower back, the small pushing into your navel. That's not good for your swing plane, not to mention your spine.

Some people have naturally long lats and have no problems making a full shoulder turn. American Davis Love III is a good example. But loads don't. I'd advise you to bring a lat stretch into a pre-round warm-up (see Screen Test, right). Completing your backswing will suddenly become a whole lot easier.

Flex gives speed
 Your flexibility has a direct effect on clubhead speed. If your Latissimus muscles are stretched and loose, you can make a fuller backswing turn on a wider arc. Both will help you build power.

Flexibility Central
 This muscle here is the Latissimus; we'll just call it the Lat. At one end of it is your spine; at the other, your shoulder. In terms of your ability to turn, it is the key muscle group in your body.

Cheeky power
 Last month we looked at how the glute muscles in your rear are the major power creators in the swing. But it takes the rotational movement in your torso to load them up. The longer your Lats, the more you can load.

FLEXIBILITY demonstrated by Gareth Johnston, assistant pro at Downshire GC

HEAVY CLUB - FRIEND OR FOE?

Vijay Singh is one of many Tour pros who routinely swing a weighted club in practice. I'd urge you to do the same - but make sure you're using it for the right reasons.

There's a misconception that a weighted club is a power aid, designed to build muscles. No. A weighted club is for flexibility. It uses momentum to drive your body into a more flexible shape. It is for muscle length, not muscle strength.

If you use a weighted club, swing at no more than half your normal swing speed. Vijay swings his even slower.

I'd advise you to use a weighted club as a break-up in practice - hit 10 shots, then make three swings with the heavy club. This has a great side-effect too. Your normal club starts to feel very light in your hands, which helps you lighten your grip pressure. That's going to help you transfer the power from your body movement through and into the club.

Heavy metal
 Use a weighted club to boost your flexibility, not strength.

DIET - CARB ATTACK

Golfers, forget the Atkins diet: you need carbohydrates to keep you bright and bouncy to the 18th. But choose the right sort: **Rocket fuel** (walking to the 18th tee, jaded but winning): chocolate, syrups, fruit juices, sticky stuff, stuff that melts. **Slow burners** (evening meal before round the next morning): lash down the biggest pasta bake possible - heavy on the pasta. For breakfast, go for a bucketful of porridge.



Golf health shorts

Want a quick way to beat tension?

Focus on your jaw. As part of your set-up routine, loosen your jaw and unlock your teeth in your closed mouth. It's a powerful trigger for beating body muscle tightness during the swing.

Also...

Slippy grips need more effort to hold. Result? More tension in your hands. Get rid of grease with detergent and water. Scrub, then towel-dry your grips. Then wipe them again with your detergent and let them air-dry. You'll be amazed how grippy they feel.

Have a pint before you play...

Of water, that is. Golfers cannot drink enough fluids. Get through at least a litre of water during the round. Drink before you get thirsty, not after.

Why you can hit the ball further

There are 400 muscles and 70 joints in your body. And yes, you use every one in the swing. Still think you don't need physical training?

Watch your layers

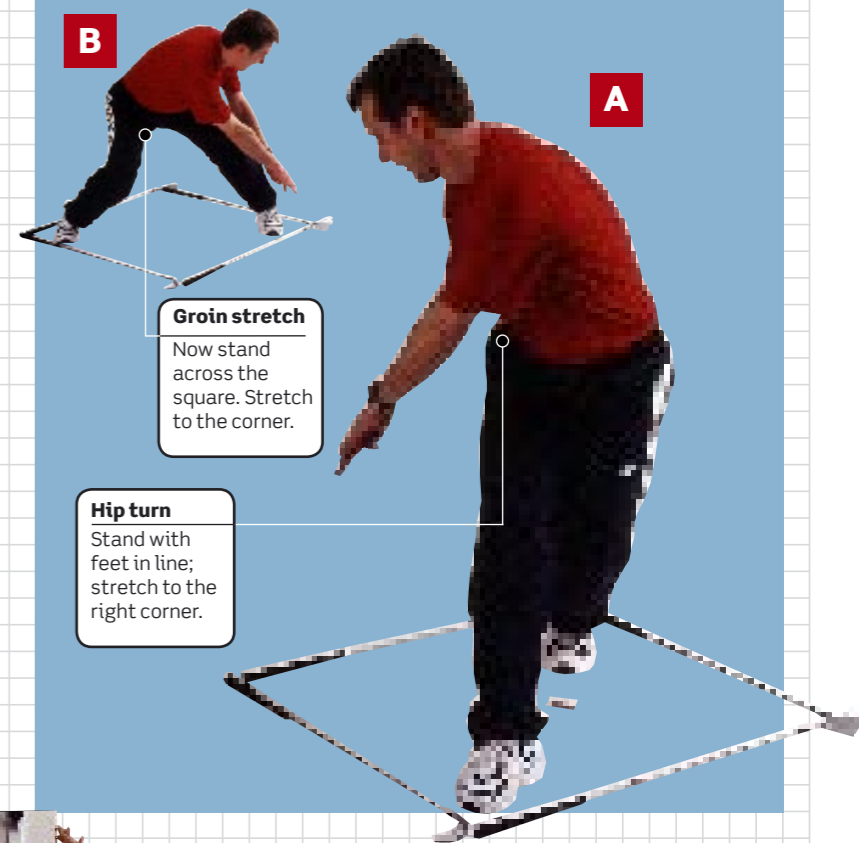
Invest in performance fabrics rather than wear loads of swing-stifling layers. New thermo-reflective materials are great for warmth.

POWER DRILL - HIP MOBILITY WARM-UP

Think for a minute about your backswing. Essentially, the movement involves a balanced rotation into your right hip. This is the holy grail of the golf swing; the better you can do this, the more power and accuracy you generate. I call this rotational movement 'loading the cannon'. It makes sense for you to practise this key move - and that's what this hip mobility drill is about.

Don't worry, you won't get anywhere near. But you will feel yourself coiling nicely into your right hip as you try. The fact your feet are in line adds a balance aspect to this drill. Again, this hip mobility is only any use to you in the golf swing if you are balanced.

B Now stand across your square, feet in opposite corners. Stretch down into both corners where your feet are. This stretches the groin muscles in the inside of your hip. When you work one muscle, it's important to balance it by training the opposite, counterbalancing one. It helps avoid injury too.



Groin stretch
 Now stand across the square. Stretch to the corner.

Hip turn
 Stand with feet in line; stretch to the right corner.

SCREEN TEST - GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

On the opposite page I explain how the lat muscles under your shoulders are crucial if you are to make a full backswing turn. Here's a simple test to see how flexible you are here and to stretch out your lats before the round:
1 Stand a foot from a wall. Lean back so the length of your back and the back of your head is against the wall.
2 Stretch your hands up high over your head. Keep them moving back towards the wall. Do not allow the small of your back to leave the wall; keep it pressed back. You should be able to touch the wall with your hands.

Bob Wood is a chartered physio and functional training expert. Email him at physical@bkwood.freeserve.co.uk
 ★ Consult your GP before starting a fitness programme.

