

WHY YOGA IS GOOD FOR YOU

There is a special synergy between yoga and golf. Golf is a physically and mentally demanding game and yoga immensely helps one's development in these two areas. By JO OIU

MANY PEOPLE DO SIMPLE EXERCISES BEFORE BEGINNING THEIR GAME OF GOLF. HOWEVER, MANY DON'T REALISE THAT YOGA, THE PRACTICE OF PHYSICAL POSTURES OR poses, can easily be incorporated into one's regular golf routine. Even golf legend, Tiger Woods and local pro, Mardan Mamat have never been averse to employing yoga techniques to establish calm, focus and concentration to help them play better. The latter credits yoga with giving him a boost in his career with two big wins on Tour including the 2006 Singapore Masters.

The word yoga means 'union' in Sanskrit. Executed through a series of poses or postures – each of which has specific physical benefits – yoga intends to re-create the union between the mind, body and spirit.

Most people think that yoga involves merely stretching. However, it is about creating a balance in the body by developing strength, flexibility and discipline. Besides helping to shape and tone muscles, yoga also instils a level of mental calmness necessary for focus and concentration in golf.

Regular yoga practice has a number of benefits to the body and mind, namely stress reduction, body awareness and mental focus. Although yoga is often intensely physical, the accompanying concentration levels help bring calmness to the mind.

Vikram Singh Chamiyal, instructor with True Yoga with over seven

years' experience in India, China and Singapore, says, "Yoga improves breathing techniques for golfers, which help him or her combat physical stress, as well as improve flexibility and dexterity. Golfers also gain better mental control and concentration to help perform better."

The stretches taught in yoga help keep the body supple, which is necessary in general physical maintenance and prevention of golfing injuries. Practised correctly and regularly, yoga helps strengthen and condition injured areas. Renowned 'Yoga for Golfers' guru, Katherine Roberts has this to say, "Stay in your comfort zone and you will remain the same. Push beyond the comfort zone and you will make the changes you desire. Living outside of your 'box' is where the change occurs."

Golf requires intense concentration and sometimes, this focus can be broken due to the proximity of spectators or onlookers as one prepares to tee-off. As Vikram points out, "Golf is a spectator sport, where spectators stand close to the golfer during the game. A golfer needs to stay mentally independent so his game or shot is unaffected."

The benefits of yoga translate beyond a game of golf; armed with a better ability to concentrate and focus mentally, it helps the golfer in his daily personal or business relationships.

If you are training hard for an important golf game or tournament, Vikram recommends the following yoga postures:



SHOULDER ROTATION

The Shoulder Rotation helps relieve stiffness and stress around the shoulder and neck area. This

increases flexibility and improves the rhythm and swing:

- Start first with hands resting lightly on shoulders (photo 1).

- Roll the shoulders around clockwise and then counter-clockwise (2-4).

- Inhale deeply and exhale, relaxing the shoulders simultaneously (5).

SPINAL TWIST

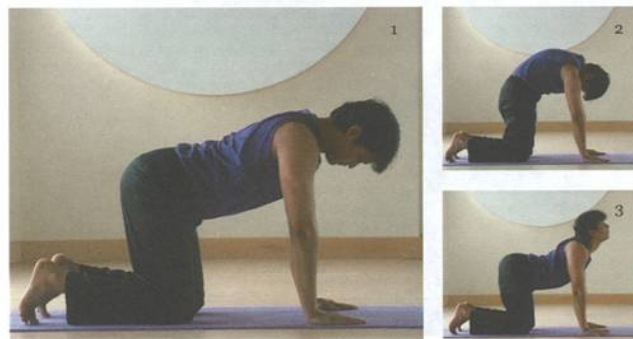
The Spinal Twist relieves stiffness around the lower back muscles. This increases strength and flexibility of lower back muscles and your spine:



- While sitting cross-legged on the floor, place your left palm on your right knee and then place your right palm at the base of your tailbone.



- Straighten your back. You should feel the stretch in your back muscles.
- Repeat the exercise, but this time with your right palm on your left knee and your left palm at the base of your tailbone.

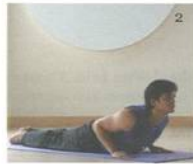


CAT POSE

The Cat Pose relieves stiffness and stress around the spine, back (upper, middle and lower back) and neck. It also improves the strength and flexibility of the spine:

- Get down to your hands and knees and place your hands directly under your shoulders. Spread your fingers wide apart so that the entire palm presses onto the floor. Tuck in your toes. This helps to create more flexibility in the feet and supports more push off power in your swing (photo 1).

- Inhale and draw your navel towards the spine. Make sure that your spine is pointing towards the ceiling and your chin is tucked into your chest (2).
- Straighten your back once again and look up to the ceiling while inhaling.
- Finally, tuck in your toes, press them firmly to the floor and exhale deeply. This time, your spine is curved into a 'U' shape and make sure to pull your abdominal muscles to the floor (3).



COBRA POSE

The Cobra Pose relieves stiffness and reduces stress of the lower back muscles and also increases strength in your shoulders and grip:

- Lie face down and rest your forehead on the floor. Make sure that your feet are together and your toes pointing behind you (photo 1).

- Bend your arms and press your palms flat on the floor close to your body and beside your rib cage (2).
- As you inhale, gently push your body off the floor, lifting your head and tilting it backwards, with your chin pointing upwards (3).
- Exhale while lowering the upper body back to the floor.

MEDITATION POSE

The Meditation Pose is a good way to relax and relieve stress before and after golf. While executing this pose the golfer will be consumed by a calm feeling. After completing the pose, he/she will feel more aware, and ready for a challenging game.



- Concentrate on taking deep breaths.



- Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth.

Yoga need not be limited to just before and after a game. Whilst waiting for your turn on the course, Vikram suggests trying the Spinal Twist to help stretch the muscles of the lower back, which are usually stiff during the game. This aids golfers when they tee off as their muscles will be less tense, which is good for the swing.

Alternatively, one can try the Meditation Pose to calm down and to help focus on the game. After a strenuous game, it is also a good way to warm down and relax. The golfer should concentrate on taking deep breaths, inhaling through the nose and then exhaling through the mouth. In fact, the Meditation Pose can be performed anywhere, even as the golfer is seated in a buggy, says Vikram.

The stationary buggy can also be used to provide stabilising support for standing stretches and bends, either in-between turns or at the end of the session. It's all about keeping the body constantly 'stretched', supple and flexible in anticipation of one's turn. In addition, potential

injuries are also kept at bay and one's stamina and endurance can be maintained at a competition level. Ms Katherine Roberts offers many different suggestions (www.krtotalfitness.com) for pre-session and in-session golf exercises to keep one fighting fit at all times. ©

BENEFITS OF YOGA ON THE GREEN

- Maintains power, endurance and stamina
- Stretching between turns keeps physical injuries at bay
- Instils and strengthens mental discipline, focus and concentration, even in the presence of spectators; eases tension to let the golfer maximise his potential
- Relaxes the body and keeps it supple
- Relieves back soreness and stiffness