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## STRIKE A POSE

Ancient tradition, modern application—  
a look at the perfect pairing of yoga and golf.

By Kate Meyers

I am a Colorado cliché. I eat granola. I wear comfortable shoes. And please—I love yoga. But I also love golf, and I can tell you that the two are as sweetly matched as Phil and Bones.

You do not need to have Lululemon in your closet. You do not need to be able to touch your toes. You just need to be able to breathe. Breathing is mandatory. Seriously. Golf can wreak havoc on your body and mess with your mind. But yoga, done safely and sanely, can have the opposite effect and help your game in the process.

I say this because just about everything I have learned in my 12 years as a devoted practitioner of yoga is completely applicable on the golf course. The ways that yoga translates to golf are many and wonderful.

While writing this I tuned in to a golf telecast, and the announcer was talking about Tom Watson. He said, “Watson didn’t learn how to win until he learned how to control his breathing.” It was as if the golf universe was agreeing with me.

Plus there is no downside to trying a gentle yoga class to help relax your frenetic, always-checking-the-cell-phone brain and stretch your tight body. Question: When you bend down to grab the ball, whom do you resemble most—John Daly or Fred Astaire? If it’s the former than there is much to gain, grasshopper.

Herewith, a few yogic concepts that translate perfectly to the links:

### BREATH

If there’s one thing you hear over and over in yoga class, it’s that the breath is the most important part of your practice. Why? Because it calms the nervous system and allows us to use effort while maintaining ease—a duality central to both yoga and golf.

### SET-UP INFORMS THE POSTURE

Another one repeated over and over in the yoga rooms. If you don’t have the set-up right, there’s nowhere good to go. Also true with any golf shot.

### ACCEPTANCE

Some days your body is up for the remarkable, and some days it feels remarkable just to get your body up. There is a necessary acceptance of where you are on any given day and doing the best with what you’ve brought to the class or the course.

### PROCESS

In yoga we concentrate on the process and the practice. There is no finish line. There is no desired outcome beyond working through the poses to the best of your ability at any given moment. If you attach expectations to the process, you will tighten up, whereas if you focus on the process and breathe, you are much more likely to relax into your posture or your shot.

When you have a great class or make a great shot in golf, there is an ease to it, and that ease comes from letting go of expectation and relaxing into effort. Process is how you get there.

### NON-ATTACHMENT

My teachers have always said, “If you fall, good for you!” Falling, failing, hitting crappy shots is how we learn. Getting back up is how we move on. Every posture is a clean slate. Walter Hagen said that he expected to hit at least seven bad shots in a round, and after he hit one, he’d think, “Only six more to go.”

In other words, bad shots are guaranteed in golf, but there’s always a clean slate in the very next shot. You’re much more likely to find ease if you can let go of what went before.

Take the action; let go of the result. Keep breathing. I love taking my yoga with me to the golf course because it helps me calm my naturally neurotic, impatient self and remember that I am somewhere beautiful playing a game.

### PRACTICE NOT PERFECTION

Yoga instructors refer to yoga training as “your practice.” Yoga is never about perfection because there is no such thing. Yoga is just about practice—understanding what you’re working toward and doing your best, while knowing also that your best on any given day varies greatly. The more you practice, the better your bad days become.

# YOGA STRETCHES FOR GOLFERS

Shoulders, back, core, hips, legs, arms. The golf swing is an exceptionally specific and complex motion that puts stress on the body if you are not sufficiently warmed up, flexible and strong. The happy corollary, though, is that by improving your flexibility and strength, you can also positively impact your swing.\*

By Laura Kupperman

## HOME ROUTINE

If you are serious about being in top form for your golf game, we recommend a regular home regimen that includes:

### A BASIC STRETCHING ROUTINE FOR FULL BODY.

The Mayo Clinic guide to 10 basic stretches is a great starting point. [mayoclinic.com/health/stretching/SM00043](http://mayoclinic.com/health/stretching/SM00043)

**FOREARM PLANK** with fingers interlaced to build core strength and shoulder stability.

**SET-UP:** Begin on all fours, hand and knees, with knees hip-width apart.

**1)** Come down to your forearms and interlace all 10 fingers; make sure your elbows are underneath your shoulders from both the front view and side view.

**2)** Roll the thumb side of your forearms (the side closest to the ceiling) toward the ground, press down firmly. Pull shoulder blades down your back and draw your low belly in and up—don't let your low back sag. Your face should be parallel with the ground so you are gazing down and slightly forward. Stay here 15-60 seconds, building up over time.

**3)** For more challenge, stretch one leg back and tuck your toes under, then stretch the other leg back and tuck toes under, coming into full forearm plank. Feet are hip-width apart, reach your heels back and engage your quadriceps. Don't let your butt sag.



### COW-CAT AND CHILD'S POSE TO STRETCH YOUR BACK, SHOULDERS AND HIPS.

#### COW-CAT

Set-up: On hands and knees (table-top position), with wrists below shoulders, knees below hips and feet equidistant. Spread all fingers wide and make index fingers parallel with each other. Flatten hands completely and press into base of knuckles, especially index finger knuckles.

**1)** Inhale to cow: let belly hang soft, shine chest forward and spread collar bones, slide shoulder blades away from ears, look up slightly.

**2)** Exhale to cat: draw chin to chest, navel to spine, and round spine to ceiling like an angry cat. Press firmly into webbing between thumb and index fingers.

**3)** Continue in sync with your breath, 10 cows and 10 cats.

#### CHILD'S POSE

Setup: Kneeling position in which big toes touch. Open knees comfortably wide and bring hips to heels.

**1)** Relax head on the floor and gently stretch arms forward 5 breaths.

**2)** Lateral child's pose: Walk head, arms, torso, over to the right, until you feel a stretch in left side of body. Keep hips stable (don't lift left buttock). 5 breaths.

**3)** Straighten your left arm to maximize stretch, reaching from left sitting bone to left fingertips. Breathe into the left side of your body deeply. 10 breaths. Return to center, pause for 3 breaths, then repeat to other side. Return to center for 3 breaths and then release.



## ON THE COURSE

**ARM CIRCLES**, for shoulders, neck, and side body.

**SET-UP:** Stand with feet hip-width apart and parallel. Reach the crown of your head straight up to maintain good posture.

**1)** Inhale. Reach right arm forward and up to the sky. As you exhale, circle your arm behind you and down, back to the starting position, creating as big of a circle as you comfortably can.

**2)** Repeat 10 times, opening and stretching the whole right side of your torso with each circle, creating a small twist in the upper back.

**3)** Your gaze and head should follow your hand so your neck gets gently stretched as well.

**4)** Maintain good posture throughout the entire arm circle.

**5)** Repeat on the other side.

**CRESCENT MOON WITH CLUB**, for back, side body, hips, IT band, core strength.

**SET-UP:** Hold your club with hands shoulder-width or slightly wider. Cross left foot over right so pinky toes are close together or even touching (if this causes any pain, keep feet hip-width apart). Note that this is a wobbly position, so you will need to use core strength to stabilize your balance: press big toe mounds into the ground, gently engage inner thighs, draw low belly in and up.

**1)** Bring arms overhead as far as they will comfortably go. Inhale, lengthen your spine, exhale, stretch upper body to the right.

**2)** Hold for 10 breaths. With each inhale, lift out of low back; with each exhale, push hips to the left.

**3)** Inhale back to center, uncross legs and switch sides, crossing right foot over left.

**4)** Inhale back to center after 10 breaths. Put the club down and bring feet hip width apart. Take a gentle forward bend with knees bent to release low back. Stay as long as feels good, making sure belly and thighs are close together. Inhale back up when you are ready.



## BEFORE BED

REPEAT COW CAT AS DESCRIBED PREVIOUSLY.

**WINDSHIELD WIPER TWIST**, for back, psoas, hips, quad, side body and shoulders.

**SET-UP:** Lie on your back with your knees bent, soles of feet flat on the floor about mat-width apart. Bring arms out to the side in a "T" shape, hands about shoulder height, palms up.

**1)** Inhale to begin. Exhale, letting both knees slowly drop to the left.

**2)** Inhale back to center. Exhale, letting both knees drop to the right. Continue at your own pace, moving legs in a relaxed but controlled fashion. Make sure feet stay wide apart.

**3)** To add on: Gently roll your head the opposite direction from your knees. When knees go left, head goes right and vice-versa.

**4)** After 5 reps to each side, pause when both knees are to the left. To deepen the stretch (if desired), take your right foot and hook it around your outer left knee. You can also raise your right arm up higher, as high as the bicep near your ear if it feels comfortable. Take 10 slow breaths here, then release and switch sides.

**5)** After completing both sides, hug knees into chest for 10 breaths. Gently pull knees in and simultaneously reach tailbone to the floor for a low-back stretch.

*\*If you have pre-existing injuries or conditions, you should get approval from a doctor first and always listen to your body.*