



Tips and Techniques for Golf Players: Play like a Pro!

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INTRODUCTION

Golf is one of the oldest sports known to man. While its origins remain a matter of debate, the accepted history credits the sport's birth to the Scottish. It is said this stately game of kings began in the 12th century when shepherds passed the time by trying to knock stones into holes on the grounds where St. Andrews now sits.

From its ancient beginnings, golf has grown into an international sport, loved the world over. With thousands of courses now available, each offering their own distinct levels of challenge, this is a sport that demands not only physical ability, but also mental acumen.

Although primarily known as a sport of the privileged, golf has had its elusive quality brushed aside thanks to the creation of public courses found throughout the United States and elsewhere. From exclusive, high-end country clubs with Professional Golf Association tournament courses to public play areas with open entry, this is now a sport that cuts across socioeconomic lines.

Demanding on the body and the mind both, golf is a sport that is best improved upon through practice. It takes time, effort and dedication to develop skills that might rival a pro. But, by following these tips for nutrition, fitness, stretching and concentration, you just might find yourself besting your competition by playing like a true pro!

NUTRITION

Golf might not be the most physically demanding of sports, but it does take its toll on the body. The stamina required of the game can be compounded by the fact that play normally takes place during the warmer months.

To excel at this sport, players must be able to endure long hours out in the elements and they must have the ability to walk great distances. Even when carts are used, golf can still demand a great deal of endurance from its players.

If you want to play like a pro, you will need to maintain your body like an athlete. This calls for proper hydration and nutrition on and off the course.

Chris Jenkins, a Professional Golf Association player, stresses the need for golfers to maintain a healthy, energy-rich diet to maintain their abilities on the course. This includes not only eating properly, but also hydrating the body well.

It is important, however, to take in consideration any health concerns that you have before changing your diet (allergies, diabetes, etc.). Consult your doctor or your own dietician if necessary.

HYDRATION

Proper hydration is essential for helping a player maintain a high level of play throughout a long, often arduous round of golf. Here are some tips to maintain proper fluid levels throughout 18 holes of play:

- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages for at least 24 hours prior to a round of golf.
- Drink at least two glasses of water or sports drinks in the hours before a round of golf. Sports drinks are often favored because of the additional nutrients and electrolytes they provide.
- Bring water or sports drinks with you during the round. Make sure to drink in between turns to keep hydration levels steady. This is especially necessary if playing in the heat. The sun can take a tremendous toll on a golfer's body.

- Take care after the round not to drink celebratory alcoholic beverages too quickly. Alcohol does drop blood sugar levels for a time, so it's wise to eat something before you dive into a 19th-hole drink.

In the midst of play, don't count on a feeling of thirst to be your only indication that it's time for a drink. It is important to drink every 15 to 20 minutes or so when playing in the heat and especially when walking the course without the benefit of a cart.

MEALS & SNACKS

Having the energy to complete a long course is essential for helping you play like a pro. If you sputter out after nine holes, your score will suffer. To keep your numbers low, you must learn to eat like a pro so your energy stays high.

Pros recommend following these tips to maintain the energy you need on (and even off) the course:

- **Pre-round meals**
Before a game, it's a good idea to eat a balanced, healthy meal. The best recommendations call for a diet rich in dairy, legumes, fruit, pasta and fiber. This will help maintain energy levels and prevent a bottoming out that sugary meals can produce.
- **Snacks**
It is essential to eat something at least every two hours during play. This will help keep energy levels high and help you avoid fatigue during a round. Healthful snacks like nuts, raisins and granola bars are smart.
- **Mid-course meal**
If your round of play does involve a mid-way intermission, take advantage of the time to refuel. A small meal rich in lean proteins and carbohydrates can keep you going another nine holes.
- **Routine considerations**
If it's your intent to truly play like a pro, you, no doubt, will be playing a lot of golf to hone your skills. Make sure your routine diet is healthy and rich in vitamins such as B1, B6 and B12. The healthier your overall outlook happens to be, the more likely it is your play will improve.

Food and drink are essential for improving your abilities both on and off the course. The more you do to improve your overall health, the better able you will be to pull off the moves that make the pros stand out during play.

FITNESS

Golf might not be the most physically demanding sport out there, but if you take the time to look at some of the pros, you will realize a general, good level of fitness is a hallmark among the best. Professionals like Tiger Woods maintain healthy body conditioning and weight to enable themselves to play at their peak every time they walk onto the course.

Although it's true that the pros do have dieticians, trainers and sports doctors working by their side to help them maintain a competitive edge, you can do much of this on your own to help yourself play like a real pro! With a little dedication, you can enjoy the conditioning the best in the game enjoy.

FLEXIBILITY

Golf is as much about flexibility as it is about power and endurance. To make sure you have what it takes to handle a hard swing without straining a muscle or throwing out your back, hamstrings or shoulders, it's vital to work flexibility training into your routine.

Here are a few stretching exercises that can help improve your overall flexibility and your game:

- **Bending**
Deep bending exercises can help stretch out your legs and back and keep them supple enough to handle a hard day on the course. To properly perform bending exercises, bring your palms together and raise them over your head. With your back vertical, squat down. Make sure your bottom goes to your ankles.
- **Hip twists**
This is an essential flexibility training move for golfers. To perform hip twists properly, stand with your feet slightly wider than your shoulders. Now, bend your knees and fold arms flat in front of you. Slowly rotate your body to one side. Hold there for a few moments. Repeat on the other side.
- **The Semi-Lotus Position**
Conditioning the legs with proper stretching can help you play better and enjoy your time on the course. To do this stretch, sit on the floor with both legs extended in front of you. Bring one foot up over your

opposite leg with the bottom of your foot facing your body. Bring this foot up as close to your body as possible. Gently apply pressure to that knee. Hold that position for a few moments, then switch legs.

- **Backwards Shoulder Stretch**

Shoulder flexibility is important for your swing. To loosen up properly, stand with your feet in a wide stance. Bring your hands together behind your back. While bending down, bring your arms up slowly, as high as they can go.

Avoiding injuries on the course is important for improving your game. Proper pre-round stretching can help make this happen.

ROUTINE EXERCISE

There is more to golf than swinging a club at a ball. To maintain a high level of play, you must maintain your fitness level. With this in mind, a well-rounded exercise plan can increase your strength and conditioning.

The following exercise routine suggestions can help you change your game for the better:

A basic workout will contain several components, including warm up, cardio and strength training exercises. A solid, basic workout should take place at least three times a week for proper conditioning.

Routine exercise for golfers might include:

- **Basic stretches**

Spend at least 15 minutes warming up with the stretches recommended above. Make sure the body is limber and ready for action before moving on to more demanding exercises.

- **Cardiovascular**

Cardio workouts are essential for improving endurance on and off the course. Some suggestions of exercises that can help on this front include jogging, swimming, using a stationary bike, working out on a treadmill or elliptical machine. Make sure to start out with at least a few minutes of cardio exercise at a time and work up to target heart rate levels. Checking with a physician before starting a cardio routine is smart.

- **Strength training**

This can be important for boosting the strength behind swings and

improving overall conditioning. A weight-lifting routine or even using a Smith machine can help with strength training. You're not necessarily out to win a body building contest here. Remember, you do, however, want to boost power. Maintaining lean muscle mass can make a big difference in your play.

YOGA & OTHER EXERCISES

Just like golf, yoga demands endurance, flexibility and concentration. The similarities make this a natural exercise for golfers to pursue. The principles of yoga, when applied to the game, can help a golfer shave strokes off a final score like few other physical pursuits.

A basic yoga routine will involve such components as:

- **Breathing techniques**
This helps bring mind and body together so concentration is high and stress is low.
- **Warming up**
Basic stretches and posturing help get the blood flowing while the mind and body relax.
- **Posturing**
The heart and soul of yoga is found in the posturing. When flexibility is high and concentration is as well practitioners of this form of exercise can achieve incredible feats.
- **Visualization**
This essential component of yoga translates well to golf. Visualization can give yoga practitioners – and golfers – the inner strength they need to see things become reality in the minds so they happen in the real world (and on the course), as well.

Other alternative exercise forms that can help golfers include such things as Pilates, karate and swimming. Any exercise that improves endurance, demands concentration and increases strength can be beneficial for golfers.

GRIP

How you hold your club can have as much impact on your play as how well conditioned you are. If you don't have a basic hold down correctly, you won't have the power and guidance necessary to play like a pro.

To enjoy good grip, try using these technique suggestions:

- Take your left hand and point your fingers toward the ground. Make sure the club grip is in line with your little finger and the middle joint of your forefinger. Close this hand around the club. Be certain the heel of your left hand is on top of the grip. Don't allow gaps between the grip and your little finger.
- To properly place your right hand on the club, make sure you hold the actual grip in your fingers. This will allow for a full hinging of the wrists in your backswing without sacrificing control.
- Test your grip by seeing if you can use your wrists to create a 90-degree angle when the club is pulled upward. If you lack this mobility, your grip is off.
- Adjust your grip for putting. Remember, putting isn't about power as much as it is accuracy. Don't use exactly the same grip on the club when you're putting as when you're trying for a long drive. To adjust, angle your wrists downward and move the grip away from your fingers and into the lifeline of your left hand (or right if you happen to be a leftie). You want to take the grip away from your fingers to reduce the power of your swing and increase smoothness.

STANCE

Proper stance is essential for lining up shots correctly and delivering the swing with accuracy and the right amount of power. If your stance is off, your game will be, too. Don't worry if your stance now is incorrect – many seasoned golfers could stand to improve on this point.

So, how can you improve your stance and play like a pro? Try following these tips:

- Spread your legs about as wide as your shoulders. Your basic stance should be comfortable and create an inverted "V" with your legs.

Remember, you want to be evenly balanced on both legs for a proper swing.

- Hold your club with the proper grip and then bend forward from the base of your spine. You don't want to hunch over the ball.
- Keep your back in line and your knees slightly bent.
- Do not arch your back or hunch your shoulders when in stance.
- Make sure your hands hang underneath your shoulders and that the end of the club points toward your stomach.

To test the alignment of your stance, try these things:

- Put yourself into your normal, natural stance.
- Aim at your target and then lay your club down on the ground.
- Step back behind the ball and the club and sight in your shot (like a pool player might).
- If your club is slightly left of the target, you're on track. If it's to the right, your lineup needs improving.

GOLF SWING TIPS

All the preparation in the world won't improve your golf game if your swing is off. To play like a pro and get the score of your dreams, you have to hone your ability at actually connecting with the ball to make it go where you want it to.

To enjoy better swing action in different circumstances, try following these tips:

- **Using hinging to your advantage**
When you need power behind a swing, hinging can be helpful. To exercise control over the length of your swing and enjoy solid contact, setup with a 45-degree angle between your left arm and the club shaft. This will help you start your swing with your wrists hinged halfway to your desired 90-degree point. Keep your hands close to the ground during the takeaway. Your goal is to make sure your left thumb points at your right shoulder as quickly as possible. You can tell if you've done the proper wrist hinge if your left arm is parallel with the ground while the club's shaft is perpendicular to it.

- **Use your elbow to avoid the slice**
 Pay attention to the positioning of your right elbow to keep slices out of the picture. Make sure your right elbow is positioned near the seam of your shirt. If the elbow is kept in this area, it will allow your shoulders to turn level to the spine, which will make it easier to drop the club inside during the downswing. This can improve control and offer maximum power.
- **Watch your hands**
 It is important to keep your hands low and limit the height of the ball flight for maximum distance. You can achieve this by keeping your hands low in the finish of a stroke.
- **Align for proper backswing**
 To achieve the control and power you want, make sure to hold your right forearm parallel to your spine. Your left wrist should be flat. When you perform a proper backswing, your elbows and arms will form a triangle.
- **Get power from your body**
 Don't rely on your arms to put power behind your shots. While this can be effective, you will lose control of your swing. To enjoy proper power, rely on your body. Practice putting your body into the swing. If you normally rely on your hands, this can take some work. Once you do succeed in moving the club with your body, you'll find the ball goes into the air on a more consistent basis. It will also help on your downswing.
- **Backswing basics**
 The backswing is essential for helping you put some power into your downswing. Remember, the power should not be present here. Try to make your backswing, slow and deliberate. Keep your alignment and don't worry about rushing. Your left arm should be kept as straight as possible while you take the club back as far as it will go without strain.
- **Downswing basics**
 For your basic shot, downswing is where you want to build up power. To enjoy a solid downswing, make sure you begin your swing with the hips and keep your head behind your ball. Don't use your hands to increase power – it should come from the leverage in the angle that's formed between your wrists and the club. Try to gradually increase speed on your downswing and do maintain balance.
- **Follow through matters**
 Once you connect with the ball, your swing is not over. You still need to follow through after impact to ensure a good shot. For proper follow

through, make sure the club fully releases while your head is still behind the ball. Your head should be allowed to come up along with your right shoulder. Once your shot is completed, your chin should be over your right shoulder. Your head will face the target.

Getting proper swing techniques down can take some time and practice. It's not a bad idea to hit the range for routine practice as you work new swings into your routine. Practice does make perfect and it can help you play more like a pro!

CHIPPING ADVICE

Chipping to get yourself out of a pinch is as important in a game of golf as a proper long-shot swing. To properly execute a chip, you will have to change your basic stance a bit.

To set yourself up right for a chip, you will want stand with your feet more closely together than you would for a regular shot. Generally, about a foot apart will do. You should make sure to put your weight on your forward foot (right foot for left handed golfers or left foot for right handed). Your back foot should be light enough to almost lift off the ground.

For proper hand positioning, make sure your hands are actually ahead of the ball. Keep your stroke short, but do follow through. Your legs and upper body should be held still on the shot. Rely on your shoulders and your arms to carry shot through during the stroke.

Practice chipping drills to improve your short game. You can do this in your backyard by setting up a practice course. Just put out a small, flat target in your lawn. Pretend this is the edge of your green. Now, try chipping from a few feet away to practice your technique. Once you get it down with a few well-landed balls, move back and start over. Take the time to practice with all your favorite clubs. Don't just rely on your wedges.

PUTTING ADVICE

Power and flight matter on the long drives, but when it's time putt, finesse becomes essential. To golf like a pro, you need to make sure your putts are true and accurate.

Try following these tips:

- **Get your stance down**
Having the right stance for putting is vital for keeping strokes off your game. It doesn't do you any good to reach the green in a shot or two and then blow your score out of the water by adding strokes on the short game. A good stance for putting calls for a slightly wider starting position than chipping. You want to have your body weight move from right to left during the stroke to control alignment and distance. Make sure your knee movement is kept at a minimum.
- **The string drill**
This is a drill that can help you make certain your eyes stay in the right position over the ball when you are putting. Remember, you should keep your eyes positioned over the ball when putting and you need to maintain a square putter face throughout your stroke. To achieve this, try to align your shoulders left and parallel of your target. Avoid shoulder rotation in the shot. What you want is a vertical shoulder rock, which allow for the proper alignment.
- **Practice aim and alignment**
To properly work on your putting, setting up a backyard drill course can prove very beneficial. Create short-game targets and work on lining up your shots, learning the proper power to put behind putts and also work on improving your stance. Remember, the short game is not as much about power as it is finesse and judgment. Vary your practice targets in distance and difficulty. Make sure to include a few inclines and declines. Not every putting surface is perfectly flat.

CONCENTRATION IS EVERYTHING

Proper form, nutrition, exercise, conditioning and swing will only take you so far on the course. If you want to take your game to the next level and really learn how to play like a pro, you have to master your concentration. Shots have to be properly lined up and executed. To pull this off, you must let concentration rule your game.

Try using these tips to improve your concentration on the course:

- **Slow down before shots**
Golfing isn't a race to the end of 18 holes. Make sure you take the time to slow down, breathe and examine shots before you take them.

- **Properly align your shots**
Do take the time to eye your shots and make sure your alignment is right. This can be as important for your long game as it is putting.
- **Relax**
Don't stress out on an individual stroke. If something goes wrong with a shot, step back and examine your new position. Take a deep breath and move forward from a relaxed state of mind.
- **Block out distractions**
Try to focus only on the shot when you are playing. Wipe your mind clean of distractions. Yoga exercises can help immensely on this.
- **Visualize success**
While this technique won't guarantee a perfect shot if your alignment and swing are off, it can help you immensely if they are in check. If you see yourself making a shot and believe you can do it, the chances of pulling off a great score will increase.

Golf is an incredible game of man against ball. Whether you play against your own best score or you want to beat your friends and colleagues on the course, proper nutrition, exercise, preparation, stance, swings and concentration will all make a difference. To excel at this sport and learn to play like a pro, you need to bring all these pieces together into a total package. With practice and dedication, you can find yourself playing like a pro in no time at all!