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Photos by Scott K. Brown

Ancient Advances

Develop rhythm in your swing by incorporating time-honored Yoga and T'ai Chi techniques



The golf world has made huge strides in developing and connecting the ways in which physical conditioning can enhance one's performance.

Less than a decade ago, the talk of golf fitness used to provoke skepticism. Today, there are irrefutable applications to the golf swing with disciplines as commonplace as yoga to the far-reaching eastern influences of a martial art called T'ai Chi.

Both of these ancient physical and mental disciplines have similar and beneficial uses in golf which are distinctly different from their stereotypical associations with flexible backbends and karate. Yoga and T'ai Chi teach you how to coordinate your breath, body and mind to ingrain independent movements into a fluid rhythm with efficient muscular control.

Furthermore, applying these disciplines to your golf swing will help you effectively develop a solid kines-

thetic understanding of how to initiate power from the feet and transfer it to the waist and shoulders, helping you generate an efficient, repeatable and biomechanically healthy swing.

Remember, you don't have to be a yogi or sensei to perform yoga and T'ai Chi drills that will stretch the limits of your game.

Breathe Easy

One of the foremost tenants taught in yoga and T'ai Chi classes is the appropriate use of one's breath. Take a deep breath; you'll likely discover that you are a "chest breather," with your upper body expanding and contacting. In contrast, Yoga and T'ai Chi breathing focus on the belly and using it properly can help your golf game.

HERE'S HOW: On the inhale through your nose, your belly should expand and on the exhale, your belly button moves toward your spine, known as "sinking the breath." With practice, you will be able to use the process of exhalation to activate golf-specific abdominal muscles. These same muscles serve to keep you in proper positions, assist with rotation, protect the

spine and provide a foundation for better balance and effective power transfer.

In order to practice your golf breath, assume your normal address position and breathe in, then out far out as possible, through the belly. At the very end of your exhale, you will feel your lower abdominal muscles contract. Maintain this sensation while continuing to breathe normally for six breaths. Repeat this breathing process at the top of your swing to the impact position and all the way to the follow-through. Ultimately, applying this concept to your setup / pre-shot routine and maintaining this abdominal "brace" will help you generate a balanced, fluid golf swing.



One of the keys to a fluid swing entails using your breath properly at address.

Watch your back: Lower back stability can help you get a strong follow-through position, while a weak position can cause your back to arch and result in an inefficient motion.



Do the Limbo

Integrating golf-specific yoga and T'ai Chi breathing can help protect your back throughout the swing.

Stand tall and arch your back as far as possible without falling over, like going under a limbo pole. Now, stand tall and exhale to capacity, feeling your lower abdominal muscles, and arch back again. You will not be able to go as far, nor will you feel a jamming sensation in your lower back.

As applied to the golf swing, this concept will prevent excessive rotations, reverse spine angles and extension motions which can be inefficient and cause injury.

Strike a Pose

Yoga and T'ai Chi promote principles of a solid connection of the feet to the ground, which golfers understand as ground feel or foot stability. Many golfers relocate their feet during the golf swing, leading to inconsistent ball-striking. In both disciplines, whether you are in postures that require a heel to toe or side-by-side foot position, there is a constant effort to create a shearing sensation by pushing your feet apart in opposite directions.

Slightly tear a piece of paper in the middle and place it on the floor (*right*). Take a stance with your feet on either edge of the paper. Apply equal pressure on the inside and outside of your feet yet with your weight more in the middle or balls of your feet than the heels. Use the pressure to gently pull the paper in opposite directions without ripping it and feel the sense of stability in your feet and legs.

Now, apply this concept without the magazine paper to other yoga / T'ai Chi postures called the horse pose, as if riding a horse, and bow pose, akin to shooting bow and arrow. Begin with a wide stance, as shown for the horse stance, and apply a gentle "shearing force" in either direction for five seconds, then try it with a narrow stance and repeat the action. Follow the same procedure with the bow stance and ultimately you will be able to employ this concept with your address position and maintain a stable base of support throughout your swing.



Bow Pose

Get connected to the ground by practicing simple shear-force exercises with your feet. Such techniques as a bow pose and a horse stance can translate to your golf game.



Horse Stance



Tour Twirl

Both Yoga and T'ai Chi use flowing, connected movements which begin with ground feel and transfer power through the waist or core, tying it all together in a golf-specific manner.

Stand with your feet at shoulder width, applying both the concepts of shear force with your feet and engaging your abdominal muscles via expiration without holding your breath. Hold your arms out as if squeezing a large ball into your chest (*pictured*), sensing the stability in the waistline and lower body. Slowly and rhythmically, twist the upper body 10 times in each direction. Repeat this process in the bow stance option with foot and abdominal stabilization, twisting 10 times in each direction.

Mirror the correct rotation in your swing using an exercise that engages your upper body.

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