Lower Your Handicap – Pilates for Golfers

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Abstract

To improve one’s golf game means shooting a lower score, thereby lowering your handicap. A golf swing requires nearly every muscle and joint in the body to be involved and move in a coordinated manner. The shoulder and upper body rotate one way, while the lower body rotates the opposite way. The pelvis is the bridge between the upper and lower body and provides the coil action of the swing.

Most golfers lack the shoulder flexibility and hip flexibility needed to address the ball in the upswing and their core muscles lack the strength and flexibility needed to uncoil the body for the downswing and ball impact. For the golfer, this inability to achieve the proper positions leads to poor performance.

A well rounded Pilates workout employing the BASI block system can address flexibility, strength, stability, coordination and mental focus needed to improve one’s game and lower your handicap.
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Anatomical Description

* Upswing: Shoulder Extension, Flexion, Abduction, Adduction, Internal and External Rotation, Hip Internal and External Rotation, Internal and External Obliques

* Downswing: Core engagement with Obliques, and psoas major. Knee extension, Hip Internal and External Rotation, Hip Extension

* Follow Through: Ankle Plantar Flexion, Entire Core, Shoulder Stabilizers, Rotator Cuff

The golf swing requires core strength, shoulder strength and mobility, spinal rotation and the ability to move hips independently of the shoulders with precision, control and flow. (Kathy Corey and Paul W Corey, 2006, September)
Introduction

To improve one’s golf game means shooting a lower score, thereby lowering your handicap. A golf swing requires nearly every muscle and joint in the body to be involved and move in a coordinated manner. The shoulder and upper body rotate one way, while the lower body rotates the opposite way. The pelvis is the bridge between the upper and lower body (Isacowitz, 2013) and provide the coil action of the swing.

Most golfers lack the shoulder flexibility and hip flexibility needed to address the ball in the upswing and their core muscles lack the strength and flexibility needed to uncoil the body for the downswing and ball impact. (McLean, 1992) For the golfer, this inability to achieve the proper positions and posture leads to poor performance. When the golfer is unable to address the ball properly in setup, it affects the entire swing. This mindset is the same in Pilates, a proper setup leads to proper execution.

To help the golfer achieve the ‘ideal’ setup, the conditioning program will focus on shoulder and hip flexibility and strength. Extra emphasis will be placed on the rotational movement and core strength exercises to enhance the “uncoil” action of the swing.

Employing a well-rounded Pilates workout employing the BASI block system can address flexibility, strength, stability, coordination and mental focus needed to improve one’s game and lower your handicap.
A Case Study

Name: Peter

Age: 49 year old male who's in good physical condition. He works at a desk job using a computer during the day but on nights and weekends he plays tennis and rides his bike. In the winter months he skis and in the summer months he plays golf. He does sporadic weight and cardio training outside of his athletic pursuits.

Limitations: Peter had left knee ACL reconstructive surgery over 15 years ago. His left knee is not as flexibility nor as strong as the right knee. Sitting at a desk, he is tight and inflexible in his lower body and he holds a lot of tension in his neck and shoulders from working at a computer.

Rehabilitation treatments: For Peter, I will design him an overall full body workout that will address the four major areas needed to improve his golf positions.

- Shoulder flexibility and strength.
- Hip Flexibility and Strength
- Core Strength
- Trunk Rotation
### Conditioning Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Reason for choosing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm Up</td>
<td>Warm up</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>Fundamental warmup&lt;br&gt;Increases mobility in pelvis, hips and lumbar spine&lt;br&gt;Strengthens and stabilizes the pelvis, lower back and core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pelvic Curl (5-10 reps)&lt;br&gt;Spine Twist Supine (10 reps)&lt;br&gt;Chest Lift (10 reps)&lt;br&gt;Chest lift with Rotation (5 each side)</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foot Work&lt;br&gt;Leg lifts (5 each leg)</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>Abdominal engagement with movement in hips while keeping pelvis still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parallel heels, parallel toes, V position toes, open V heels, open V toes, calf raises</td>
<td>Reformer</td>
<td>Continued warm up with Hip extensor strength, knee extensor strength and Ankle Plantar strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdominal Work</td>
<td>Hundred Prep</td>
<td>Reformer</td>
<td>Increase abdominal strength, Shoulder flexor/ extensor control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip Work</td>
<td>Frog, circles down, circles up, opening</td>
<td>Reformer</td>
<td>Improve hip mobility and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinal Articulation</td>
<td>Bottom Lift</td>
<td>Reformer</td>
<td>Engages Quadriceps and Hips, stretches hip flexors and allows spinal articulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretches</td>
<td>Standing Lunge</td>
<td>Reformer</td>
<td>Pelvic tilts increase mobility in pelvis, hips and lumbar spine. (Thomas) Stretches hip flexors and hamstring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Body Integration</td>
<td>Kneeling cat Stretch with tower</td>
<td>Cadillac with tower</td>
<td>Uses Abdominal and back extensors while stretching shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>Reason for choosing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arm Work</td>
<td>Arms Standing series – Chest expansion, hug-a-tree, Circles up, Circles Down, punches, triceps</td>
<td>Cadillac with Tower</td>
<td>Standing series provides excellent range of motion in shoulder joints along with trunk stabilization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral Flexion /Rotation</td>
<td>Butterfly</td>
<td>Cadillac with tower</td>
<td>Oblique stretch with added rotation (out of order, but works well with arm series)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leg Work</td>
<td>Gluteals Side Lying series Side leg lift, Forward and Lift, forward with drops</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>Hip Abductor strength with pelvic stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral Flexion /Rotation</td>
<td>Spine Twist - 10 reps</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>Achieve a greater range of motion at the waist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral Flexion /Rotation</td>
<td>Saw - 10 reps</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>Supports flexibility in lower back and hamstrings, while building strength in back. Improves rotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Extension</td>
<td>Prone 1 and prone 2</td>
<td>Cadillac with Tower</td>
<td>Excellent shoulder stretch while improving back strength</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**On Course Stretches – Pole Series using a Golf Club as Assist**

| Stretch – Fundamental | Pole Series - Shoulder Stretch, Overhead Stretch, Side Stretch, Spine Twist | With a Golf Club as Pole | Excellent shoulder stretch, Oblique stretch and warm up of back muscles. |
Conclusion

Working with Peter over a 4 week period has produced successful results. He is gaining flexibility in his shoulder and hip area. This is allowing him to attain the proper positions for his golf swing. As a result, he is swinging through the ball, hitting the ball farther with an improved consistency, precision and flow.

He plans to continue his practice of Pilates as has reduced his handicap by 3 strokes. He is experiencing the added benefit of better body awareness and improved posture (on and off the course), calmness through breathing and improved mental focus.

A well rounded Pilates workout using the BASI block system can help any golfer improve their flexibility, strength, stability, coordination and mental focus needed to improve one’s game and lower their handicap.
Bibliography


