

# Come on Golfers, Let's do the Twist\*!

Copyright © 2008 by Evamarie Pilipuf / The Flexibility Coach, LLC  
[www.theflexibilitycoach.com](http://www.theflexibilitycoach.com)

I have to admit, I find one of the highlights of the month of April is watching the area golf courses begin to come alive with eager athletes, reviving their game after a long winter hibernation.

But of course, what comes with these early birdies (sorry for the pun) often come those undesired accompaniments: muscle aches and pains, post-game soreness, and a reduced range of movement that seems to worsen with each passing year. Nothing like a creeping sense of reduced mobility to make a person feel old, especially when part of the joy of sport is in cultivating a vitality that hooks back to our youthful years!

The good news is, most of the above is completely preventable; with the right stretches and an understanding of how to strengthen the core and other key muscles, you can actually improve not only your flexibility, but your performance and recovery as well. Even better, you can bring your flexibility to levels you never thought possible – better than it's ever been before! And it can all begin with the twist.



## Why Twist?

Part of what leaves our bodies vulnerable to injury are the limitations and stress caused by our repetitive, everyday tasks. Most of what we do throughout the day entails movement in only the sagittal plane; that is, forward and backward motions. Think of it: we sit, stand, walk, climb stairs, work at the computer, drive our car, eat, wash up, clean, do chores, and even when we exercise, we typically either run, walk, bike, do ab crunches, push-ups, etc. All of these are sagittal plane activities; even when there's little or no movement, our bodies are typically oriented with our limbs in front of us, such as typing on the computer or sitting watching TV. And while this helps explain why certain muscles become overstretched and underused – or overstressed and understretched, it also means the minute we ask our bodies to perform a movement outside of its norm -- a golf swing, for example, our back, hips and shoulders are ill-prepared for the flexibility, strength and coordination demands being made. Little wonder why many injuries often occur during twisting movements. By recognizing this vulnerability, however, we can take steps to train our bodies in a way that prepares them for these movements, and leaving us more comfortable overall on top of that!

### Not sure what these stretches and exercises look like?

Members of [theflexibilitycoach.com](http://theflexibilitycoach.com) can click on the hyperlink of each stretch and exercise and pull up a clear, detailed photo of the position for easy reference!



[Click here to become a member](#)

**Getting Started:** Know what to contract, know what to relax

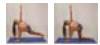
While twists can be extremely beneficial, it's important to take the right precautions and know the basics of good technique. First and foremost, please check with your doctor to ensure twists are safe for you to perform. Don't engage in twisting movements if you have an active injury or pain in your low back. Finally, avoid (or stop) any exercise or stretch that causes pain.

*\*As always, be sure to seek approval from your doctor to engage in these and other exercises/stretchers, and avoid any position or movement that causes pain or discomfort.*

It's also important to understand what muscles to activate, and what muscles to relax when performing a twist. Generally, the goal is to relax the low back, while at the same time performing a light contraction in the deep abdominal muscle complex. To activate this muscle group, draw your navel in towards your spine, without causing any change in the shape of your spinal alignment.

### Three Twists, Three Purposes

Not all twists serve the exact same purpose. Some, like the **Supine Spinal Twist**, are intended to be light, passive, restorative stretches. Some, such as the **Modified Boat with Woodchopper Twists**, are intended to strengthen the rotational strength of the back and abs. Some, such as the **Lunge Twist**, involve a little bit of both: they help stretch out the back and they engage the core muscles. Knowing which one you're performing will help you get the most out of each position.



**Twist #1: Lunge Twist, Full Version or "Kneeling" Version:** A good stretch to help loosen up the back and shoulders, which makes this a good one to use as part of the warm-up prior to a game, though it also works well as a post-workout back, leg and shoulder stretch. There are two versions: one that entails a **full lunge twist**, and a **modified "kneeling" version**, better suited for beginners or those times when the low back and legs need a more gentle approach to the stretch. The full lunge twist should only be performed if you can move your back foot far enough back so that your hips are lower than your shoulders. Additionally, with either choice, be sure to keep your front knee vertically aligned on top of your heel (don't let your front knee bend out over your toes).



**Twist #2: Modified Boat, with "Woodchopper" Twists:** This twist should actually be performed in repetition: You lean back and inhale into the Modified Boat, hands clasped (see first picture), then twist with a "woodchopper" arm movement on your exhale (as in the second picture). Note that you want to keep your neck neutral (i.e. do not "hunch up" your neck and shoulders and do not drop your chin – two common errors), and your belly button "contracted" in toward your spine.



**Twist #3: Supine Spinal Twist:** Given it's performed while lying on the back, this an excellent final stretch either after a workout, a golf outing, or at the end of a long day spent sitting or in a car. Try to relax in this stretch for at least 30 seconds per side, breathing smoothly.

### Additional Tips

All three twists can be performed daily, though if you cannot do so, at least twice per week is recommended for optimal results. When used regularly, you will typically feel better both immediately – right after and in the hours that follow the stretch, and long-term, with improvements in flexibility and comfort often seen after 4-6 weeks of regular practice. The keys are patience and consistency.

-ep

---

*\*As always, be sure to seek approval from your doctor to engage in these and other exercises/stretching, and avoid any position or movement that causes pain or discomfort.*