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By Andrea Michaud

Stretch Before You Swing

WITH WARMER TEMPERATURES FINALLY HERE, more golfers are heading out to the course. Golf is a physically demanding sport. It takes power and muscular control to consistently hit the ball at high speed, hole after hole. But while golfers take care to get their clubs ready, many forget to take care of their #1 piece of equipment – their body.

A proper warm-up consists of stretches and exercises to increase blood circulation in the muscles you use for golf. Pre-game stretching not only reduces the chance of injury, it also helps improve performance. To prepare for your next round, try these exercises (not one, all of them).

Side Bend: Stand up straight with your feet shoulder width apart and arms at your sides. Bend to the right, keeping your hips facing forward. Let your right arm slide down along your leg, while your left arm leans overhead to the right. Feel a stretch along the left side of your torso. Hold each stretch for a count of 10. Repeat 3 times on each side.

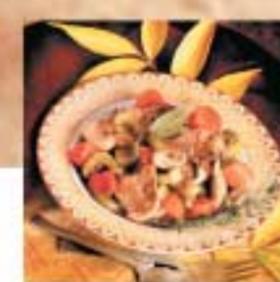
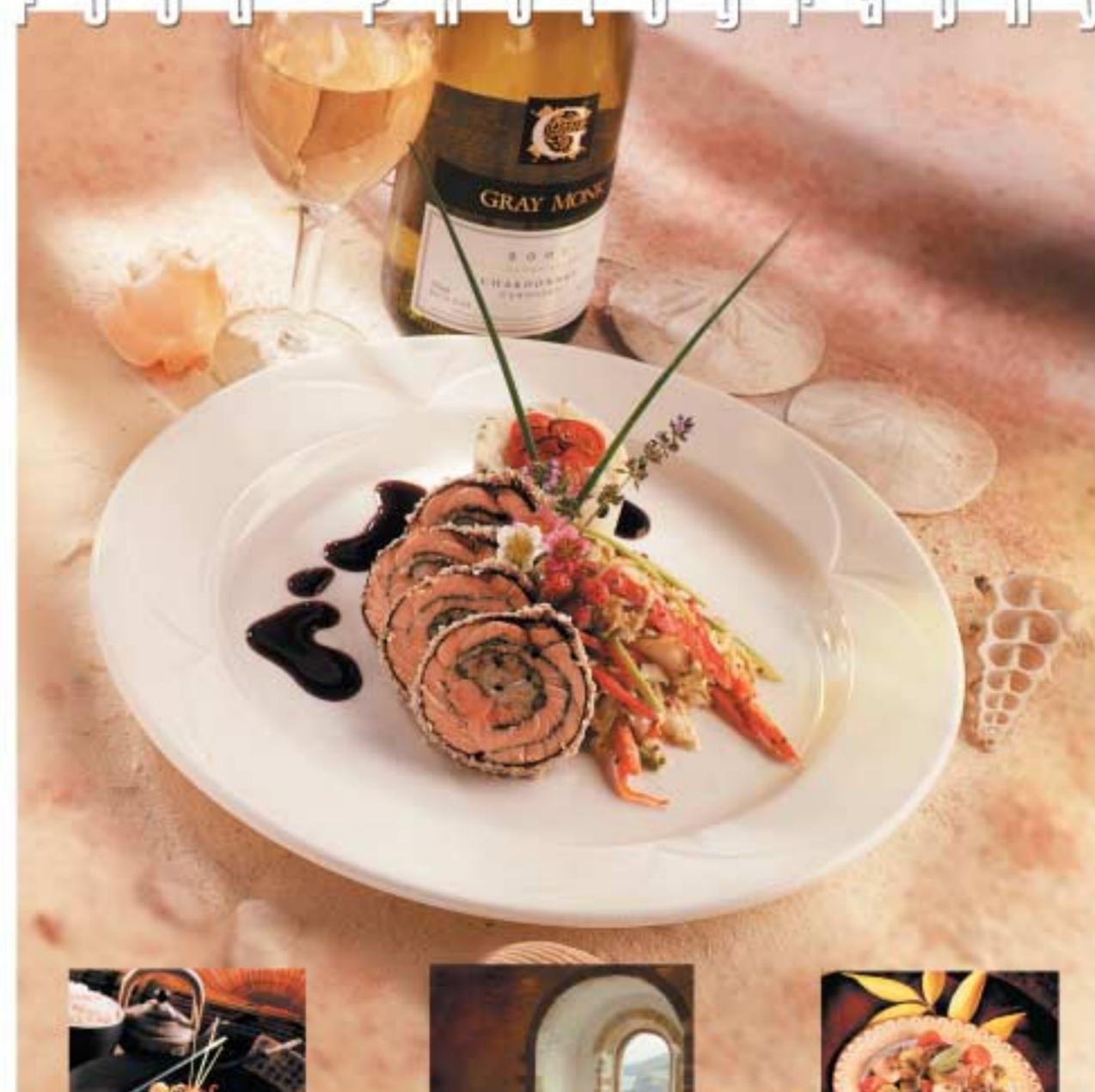
Upper Body Rotation: Stand up straight with your feet shoulder width apart and your arms bent at the elbows and grasping a club behind your head. Twist your upper body toward the right, keeping your hips facing forward. Hold for a count of 10. Twist your upper body toward the left and hold. Repeat each stretch 3 times.

Shoulder Stretch: Grasp your club in front of you with your hands crossed – bottom hand palm up, top hand palm down. With your bottom hand, push the club in the direction of your top hand. Feel a stretch in the back of your shoulder. Hold each stretch for a count of 10. Repeat 3 times on each side.

Quadricep Stretch: Stand with one arm holding onto the cart or your golf partner. With the other hand grasp your ankle and pull your foot behind you. Feel a stretch in the front of your thigh. Hold for a count of 10 and repeat 3 times on each leg.

As with any sport, potential injuries can occur in golf if your body is not ready to take on the stress of a repeated movement. Those who golf on a regular basis know how important it is to be mentally prepared. It is also important to be physically ready. Proper warm-up, flexibility and swing mechanics will not only help your game, but will also help you avoid putting your clubs away early due to injury.

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