




# The trinity of neck superstretches

In the continuation of a three-part series, Ramsay McMaster reveals three more of his nine unique golf-specific 'superstretches' that can revitalise your golf warm-up.

 The neck is a key area of the golf swing that is undervalued and overlooked. With elite players, we've found the neck and shoulder blades have a massive effect on the golf swing on initial takeaway transition and at impact. Poor impact position is a major cause of wrist and shoulder injuries in golfers. Typically, when the neck is jammed behind the ball, it actually causes minor whiplash. So it's important to promote flexibility and stability around the neck and shoulder region to stay injury-free.

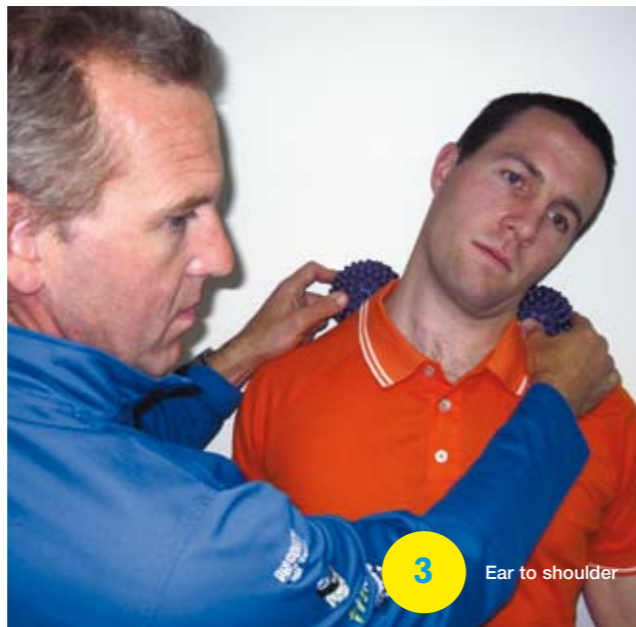
There are a couple of reasons why the neck gets stuck in a bad position during the golf swing. Firstly, there is a swing misconception to keep your head still, which is plainly wrong. With elite players, there is a sideways movement and rotation of the neck. You need to retain that freedom of movement and control, but if your head is still that's not going to happen as much.

Another reason for a stiff neck is because most tour players spend inordinate amounts of time working on their short games, leaning over putts and chips. Conversely, club golfers tend to suffer neck tightness from sitting hunched over a computer screen or speaking on the telephone for long periods. Juniors tend to have hunched posture from carrying heavy school bags and playing computer games.

With juniors and seniors, we've also found the head tends to move towards the ball during the swing, which is commonly known as "reverse upper spine". It's an awkward problem, not entirely dissimilar to the "reverse pivot" where a right-hander puts his weight on the left side during the backswing.

If the neck isn't functioning properly, you could end up with disc lesions in your neck or rotator cuff damage. It's likely you'll have general upper neck or shoulder pain and spasms. It can also lead to injuries down the chain, such as tennis elbow or wrist injuries because the body is making compensatory movements. It's a bit like a car towing a caravan and how it fishtails when going around a bend.

From three-dimensional biomechanical studies, we've discovered elite players tend to suffer neck tightness, particularly around the upper trapezius, which is the muscle at the top of the neck that looks like a coat hanger. You can pinch it and feel that it's usually tight. But the tighter it is, the more problems you'll have with stabilising your shoulders in the golf swing. This can have a massive effect on your short game because you can't feel the shoulder blades and they



won't work in a pendulum-style movement.

The culprits are the upper trapezius, the levator scapulae, sterno mastoid and the scalenes. Instead, you need to work the deep neck flexors and neck rotators, the lower trapezius, triceps and serratus anterior. These stabilise and promote rotation in the neck and shoulder blades, which are like the husband and wife of the upper body in the golf swing. Many muscles connect, which is why you've got to stretch them together.

The lower trapezius, serratus anterior and triceps actually pre-set the shoulder-blade muscles before you begin the backswing. It's a bit like cocking the gun before firing it. Tightness in your upper neck will inhibit good flow and recruitment. That leads to differences in swing plane and a counterbalance with the neck.

It's important to make sure you rotate and side bend your neck so there is plenty of flexibility to allow freedom of movement. And not just in one direction, but stretching with the "da Vinci" concept of using all three planes that I referred to last issue. The more your neck is moving in unison with the rest of your body, the more likely you'll have an effective golf swing and be injury-free.

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With regard to therapy, the key is to get pressure onto the areas that are tight. You'll see in the accompanying photos that we're using spiky balls on acupressure points on the upper trapezius. They help to really stretch and release that tight and overactive 'agonist', a term that I talked about last month. Feeling the compression around the neck, it allows you to strengthen and stretch the muscles that block the freedom of movement.

### ● 3. Ear to shoulder superstretch

All three of my neck superstretches require you to stand with your back against the wall with two spiky balls placed on the upper trapezius of your neck. Initially, get a friend to assist you. (Tip: raise your arms above your head in order to position the balls properly on the correct acupressure points.) Then lean back against the wall and 'feel' the spiky balls at work. Measure the pressure on your personal scale of 1 to 10.

With chin tucked in, slowly try and make your left ear touch the tip of your left shoulder. Make sure your shoulders stay horizontal at all times (no shoulder shrugging or rising upwards). Hold for 15 seconds and repeat twice. Then, counterbalance the exercise with your right ear and right shoulder. If one side is tighter, do more on that side until both 'feel' the same.

### ● 4. Nose to armpit superstretch

With your chin tucked in to a neutral position, slowly move your nose towards your left armpit. Keep the back of your skull against the wall at all times. Feel the stretch at the side and back of the neck. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat twice. Then, stretch to your right armpit. Once again, compare tightness on both sides.

### ● 5. Ear to shoulder with rotation superstretch

Repeat the 'ear to shoulder' superstretch to your left side. Enhance it by forcing the left side of your neck and left eye to rotate and look up towards the high right-hand corner of the room. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat twice. Counter the stretch to the right.

Spiky-ball starter kits can be purchased from The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448. For advice on a golf-specific training program, contact Ramsay McMaster on 0407 432 282 or e-mail [golfphysio@ozemail.com.au](mailto:golfphysio@ozemail.com.au)



**Next month:** Ramsay concludes his superstretches with four lower-body drills