

## **Posture: Alive and kicking**

Bring your swing to life; get out of your own way and your golf will be “Alive and Kicking”.

You should be comfortable when you go for a walk in the park or when you lie in bed at night, to get a good night's sleep, but should you get comfortable before you throw your body into an explosive sport?

Golf is an explosive, target orientated sport and should be treated as such, whatever your standard and however you see your dreams and goals.

Before you kick a ball do you relax? Before you return a serve in tennis do you feel loose and free of tension? No! You are ready for action. Your body is ready to get kick started and to react appropriately so that you can perform at your best. So why should golf be any different? Please relax and push your backside out as far as you can just like a peacock does during his mating ritual. Now your spine angle should be as straight and stiff as a snooker cue. Does this feel natural to you? So why are you preparing your body in this way? This can only lead to problems down the road, not only for your golf but also for your body!

Golf is a sport that thrives on controlled, explosive power. If you want to play golf at your best your body should be ready, not relaxed. If you want to rise to the challenge you need to change the way you prepare your body for your performance.

You need to put a spring in your step and be light on your feet as if playing tennis or football, dynamically prepared with muscles ready to perform. If you want to hit the ball long and straight to reach your full potential then it is imperative that your body is positioned to allow you to do so.

The correct starting position before you swing the club is more natural than is often perceived. Stand up and imagine you are waiting for a ball to be thrown in your direction. Amazingly you automatically flex your knees and lean forward with your shoulders, preparing your body for the catch. Now look at your hips. They are naturally pushed back due to the combination of the downward movement as you flex your knees and at the same time from leaning forward from your shoulders.





Dynamic, ready for action position; waiting to catch a ball

Your body automatically gets itself into position to allow you to perform at your best. The combination of flex in the knees and leaning forward with the shoulders not only naturally pushes your hips back; it also ensures that you remain perfectly balanced and ready for action. You don't have to think too much about it, especially when the ball is in motion with your body prepared to react. The underlying reason is that our brains function better and more naturally when we are reacting to a ball, leading to a throw, catch, pass or shot rather than when we have to set off the chain of events in a dead ball sport such as snooker, golf or a penalty kick in football. You will learn more about this difference and how to maximise the benefits of reacting to your target later in the swing.

Let's take the bending and flexing of the knees one step further and have a closer look at this natural yet often over analysed occurrence which takes place as we prepare our body for action. The *drop*, as I like to call it, naturally places your body's centre of gravity, which is located at the bottom of your spine, in perfect harmonic balance with the centre of gravity of your swing, which is positioned at the base of your neck. The base of your neck is the axis and the point of rotation and balance for your upper body. As you begin to build your swing you will learn the important role this plays by obeying some simple yet highly effective laws of physics.

The *drop* is you flicking the switch into sports mode. When playing football, tennis or waiting to catch a ball, you naturally lean forward with your upper body as you bend/flex your knees, which in turn pushes your hips and your body's point of centre of gravity (the bottom of your spine) backwards. Your upper body naturally leans forward to compensate for the backward shift of this point. Your body and the fantastic piece of kit lodged between your ears does all of this for you. Automatically the *drop* positions the bottom of your spine perfectly in relation to the base of your

neck so that your balance is optimised. Your spine angle is straight, as it should be, before your back is thrown into any physically demanding task.

This is where many an *expert* will begin to shout from the tree tops that a stiff and straight spine angle is the back bone of a great golf swing. Yes it plays a major role but manufacturing this position or movement without the understanding that it is a natural occurrence as part of the *drop* often results in a pain in the neck and back for the guy holding the sharp end of the stick. The key ingredient of a solid posture and the creation of a naturally straight spine angle as you address a golf ball is the correct relationship between your body's point of centre of gravity (the bottom of your spine) and your swing's point of centre of gravity (the base of your neck). You will be pleased to know that the bending of your knees as you lean forward with your shoulders does all of this for you, so *drop* the useless dribble with a spine angle as stiff as a snooker cue.

If you lean too far forward or backward with your upper or lower body this changes the relationship between these two points, resulting in a loss of balance and something which is even more devastating, a change in your spine angle at address and throughout your swing. This type of imbalance requires many complicated and inconsistent swing compensations resulting in a substantial loss of distance and control. If either the point at the bottom of your spine or the point at the base of your neck don't work in harmony your back and therefore spine angle will arch or be forced out of line with the natural dynamics of your body. Fighting with or ignoring these simple laws of physics will guarantee a dramatic weakness in both body and golf swing. So, it's about time you threw away the straight jacket and *dropped* into your optimum position, the way that Mother Nature herself intended.



*Drop* into position and allow your hands and arms to hang freely from your body. Now do the same thing with a golf club in your hands. You are not only dynamic my friend but athletically ready to fire up your swing



At address the hands and arms naturally hang down freely from the body

Another often over complicated and over analysed factor which has a direct influence on the position of your spine angle is the length of the golf club that you have in your hands. A driver has a long shaft which naturally produces a marginally upright posture at address in comparison to your posture at address with a seven iron. The shaft length of your seven iron is significantly shorter than that of your driver so therefore automatically your posture appears naturally more leaned over. This has absolutely nothing to do with the way that you address the ball but simply the angle and length of the golf club shaft running from the ground up to your hands.



Posture at address with a Driver



Posture at address with a seven iron

In simple terms the longer the shaft the flatter the angle and the shorter the shaft the steeper the angle therefore, when you play a shot with a driver, your posture will *appear* slightly more upright than when you are using your seven iron. Don't think about it, just do it! You are man not a machine, if you begin to play golf by numbers as many try to, the downward spiral of devastation will tear through your game leaving one beat up owner of a golf swing you will never trust in a month of Sundays. You will know yourself what feels balanced and ready for action. Let's have a look at where it all starts to go wrong.

## **Rock and Roll**

If, from here, you lean further forward with your upper body, your body weight naturally moves onto your toes. Automatically your point of centre of gravity for your swing (the base of your neck) is forced too far forward over the ball in relation to the point of centre of gravity of your body (the bottom of your spine). This will eventually result in a loss of balance and you falling flat on your face.



Leaning too far over the ball at address forcing the body weight onto the toes

Your centre of gravity for your swing is now positioned too far forward and is no longer working in harmony with the centre of gravity for your body (bottom of spine). Your golf swing will have to be jam packed full of compensations to balance out the small physical discrepancies yet massive consequences that addressing your ball this way entails

If you now do the opposite and lean back with your upper body you will find that your hips are forced forward under your body to compensate and balance your body. The more you lean back the more your weight moves gradually onto the heels of your feet, eventually resulting in a loss of balance and you falling backwards. Your centre of gravity is now once again out of balance as your hips move too far under your body forcing the centre of gravity of your swing (base of your neck) too far back off the ball. The harmonic balance between the point of centre of gravity of your body (bottom of your spine) and the point of centre of gravity of your swing (base of your neck) is lost in a fight for balance. This scenario is setting you up for fairways full of inconsistent and weak golf shots that will hurt badly more often than you would care to admit!





Leaning too far off the ball at address forcing the body weight back onto the heels

We have now covered the two major difficulties that golfers have with their posture, so let's see how this can affect your golf swing. If your upper body is too far over the ball or, as described above, you are leaning too far forward; your body weight will favour your toes at your address position.



Leaning too far over the ball at address forcing the body weight onto the toes

During your swing this imbalance will need to be compensated for at some stage, usually with your body trying to find its natural centre of gravity. This results in your body often over compensating for your mistake at address, rocking you back onto your heels during your backswing. You are now at the top of your backswing with your body weight placed firmly on your heels which has lifted your body up and back out of its natural spine angle set at address to try to correct your balance.



The rolling of body weight onto the heels as compensation in the backswing

You now have to throw another compensation in somewhere in your downswing, fingers crossed and you'll hit a good shot and average a steady one in ten.

If you begin your address position with your body weight on your heels a similar but opposite chain of events will develop in your swing, normally as you start your downswing, rolling you onto your toes.

If you find your natural centre of gravity as I have shown you, you can eliminate a wide range of swing faults. Your swing will be well balanced allowing you to start hitting consistently powerful golf shots.

No two postures look identical as we are all built differently, with longer arms or shorter legs, but the fundamentals are always the same.



Please follow these five steps and never forget your centre of gravity as you *drop* into your sports mode, dynamically ready to swing into action:

1. Stand tall with your back and legs in an upright position and your feet just inside shoulder width apart. Your body weight should be evenly balanced on both feet.



2. Extend your arms out in front of you at waist height with your club shaft parallel to the ground and grip in the one o'clock position.



3. The *Drop*: Lean forward with your shoulders and at the same time bend your knees.



4. Lower your hands and arms until your club head touches the ground. Let your arms hang down freely from your body. You have found your natural hand position.



5. Your hands should be slightly ahead of your correct ball position which is the next important aspect of your address position! Your left arm will now be an extension of your golf club with the blade of your golf club placed directly behind your ball, correctly aligned to your target.



To have a truly dynamic, ready posture position it is essential that your centre of gravity for both body and swing are positioned correctly and are balanced in total harmony. I have now described a great routine that you can repeat before each and every shot that you play; therefore you'll be safe in the knowledge that your body is correctly positioned. Be dynamic, get yourself ready and listen to your body. Golf is no different to any other athletic, explosive, target orientated sport and above all, remember never to fight with Mother Nature. You are the way that you are, your arms or legs will not become longer or shorter overnight even if you hang from the tree tops until dawn. Let your body find its natural position.

A question that I am often presented with is, "should my right shoulder be lower than my left at address?" Your body will get itself into the correct position naturally if you follow my instructions, you can rest assured. If you put your golf under the microscope then your game will become an oasis of angles and degrees that should really be of no concern and happen automatically. Little knowledge backed up with over-analysis is the best way to rock your golfing world, shaking it from the roots until it falls apart. In your grip your right hand is lower than your left which, in turn, realigns your shoulders and your right shoulder will naturally drop slightly lower than your left at address. As you build your golf swing with me shortly, you will find that many of the things that golfers constantly fight with happen automatically and are part of your natural make-up. You will also start to understand that a golf swing is a natural movement and many of the over-analysed technicalities happen within the motion. Don't give your right shoulder a second thought again at address, this is not something that you should be focusing upon, your shoulders (along with the rest of your body) will naturally fall into place.

**Please don't** over bend your knees, you should only flex them. Too much bend will push your hips out of position and create an arched spine. This is the best and fastest way to become known as the injury prone golfer who has to cry off every other weekend with a bad back.



Over bending the knees at address forces the hips out, creating an arched spine



**Please don't** think too much about your hand position at address. Let your hands hang down from your body naturally. There will always be space for your hands as your hips will leave clearance. Don't think in numbers, e.g. hands two or three inches from the left leg. A good guide is that your hands should be in a position below your chin, but this is also not one hundred percent reliable, just let it happen naturally.



At address the hands and arms naturally hang down freely from the body



**Please don't** favour your heels or toes with your body weight, this will only lead to problems in your swing as your body weight moves around to compensate. If your centre of gravity is positioned correctly your body weight will be spread evenly, producing a solid base from which you can build your swing



The body weight favouring the heels



The body weight favouring the toes

As you can see we have now set the stage for your swing, let your body find its natural position. After personally trying numerous methods of finding a good posture, I recommend the steps as outlined above. This method has proven to be the best, easiest and most consistent, that players of all shapes and sizes can use to find a dynamic, ready position that allows your body to move freely during your golf swing.

**Please find your own individual, correct posture and never fight with the way that you were made. Find you own natural centre of gravity and your golf will thank you for it!**

*Check 4: Drop to be dynamically centred*

**To trust your golf, place it into the hands of a PGA Professional**