



Golf Health and Fitness Tips

How to Cure the Flying Elbow Syndrome

One common swing habit many golfers find difficult to change is the “flying elbow” at the top of their backswing. This is an elbow that lifts to high (see picture #1a) instead of properly rotating from the shoulder and allowing the forearm to align in a more parallel fashion with the angle of the spine (see picture #1b).

The problem with having a flying elbow at the top of the backswing is two fold; 1) Shoulder injuries can develop with repeated backswings because this shoulder position creates excessive pressure in the rotator cuff and surrounding structures that will eventually cause damage to those structures, and 2) It is difficult to bring the club back on plane from this elevated elbow position. Most golfers with flying elbows in their backswing are faders or slicers of the ball. Unless other, equally stressful, body compensations are made, the natural tendency for a golfer with a flying back elbow is to throw the club from the top on an outside to inside swing path --- a slicer’s nightmare!

The cure to the flying elbow syndrome is to first understand “why” the elbow is flying in the first place. For most golfers the problem starts with poor posture in standing and in their golf address posture. A forward bent or rounded middle (thoracic) spine due to a tight chest and frontal shoulder muscles will prevent a golfer from making a complete rotational backswing and placing the back arm into the proper position at the top of the backswing. The tightness in the chest and shoulder creating the golfer’s rounded spine also blocks their ability to fully rotate their shoulder. The common compensation movement result is to lift the back elbow instead of rotating at the tight shoulder and, *voila*, a flying elbow is born!

Once properly evaluated and understood, the cure, therefore, for the flying elbow is to increase the chest and shoulder flexibility of a golfer diagnosed to have this condition. One excellent stretching exercise to improve the flexibility of a tight chest and shoulder is called the “Standing Arm Slide”. To perform this exercise, simply stand with your back against a wall or locked door. Walk your feet several feet away from the wall or door and slide your body down the surface you are supported by until your hips and knees are bent approximately 30-60° (see picture #2). Next, elevate your arms out to your sides with your elbows bent to 90° and attempt to touch the back of your upper and lower arm flat against the wall (see picture #3). You may already notice tightness in your chest and shoulders at this time making it difficult or impossible for you to completely touch the back of your arms to the wall. That is, OK! Simply do the best you can without causing shoulder or elbow pain and gently hold this stretch position for 2-3 minutes or until you

experience a relaxing of the chest and shoulder tightness and an increased ability to touch your arms flatter against the wall. When you can eventually easily touch the wall with your arms lower by your sides, you may advance the difficulty and the benefit of this exercise by slowly sliding your arms as high as possible on the wall surface without losing complete arm (upper arm and forearm) contact with the wall (see picture #4). Hold the highest arm position you are able to achieve for 2-3 minutes or until you feel a complete relaxing of the chest and shoulder tightness. Repeat up to 10 repetitions daily for 2-3 weeks.

If you continue to receive professional instruction and practice the recommended swing drills along with you new posture and flexibility you will then notice tremendous changes in your swing. Your flying elbow will be cured and so will your slice tendencies for good.