

Set Up for Success

Failing to achieve the proper setup position is very common among golfers of all ages and ability levels. A poor setup position at address significantly contributes to poor swing performance and the development of physical stress. In fact, most professional instructors will admit that most, if not all, of a golfer's inconsistent swing motions are in some way contributed to by incorrect posture at address.

The most common mistake is bending from the wrong place. Most golfers tend to bend from their waist and/or mid-back. This is known as spinal flexion. The stresses placed on the soft tissues and joints of the lumbar spine (lower back) from prolonged or excessive activities with a bent spine are well documented in the medical journals. However, most golfers do not realize what effect this incorrect position has on their swing mechanics.

Poor posture at setup, due to excessive and/or inappropriate spinal flexion, interferes with a safe and consistently effective golf swing in three primary ways:

- It prevents ideal balance.
- It limits a complete turn.
- It reduces optimal swing motion along the swing plane.

When a golfer bends too much from the thoracic spine (mid-back) at address, the center of gravity moves excessively to the heels. The initial positioning greatly affects both static balance during the address position as well as dynamic balance throughout the entire swing. The effects are to make compensations or adjustments wherever possible to maintain balance during the swing that challenges the out of balance golfer's ability to consistently move their hands and club in the proper swing plane. Also, the lack of rotational ability in the spine forces an excessive amount of leg and hip turn during the backswing. This often leads to a reverse pivot on the backswing and a lateral sliding motion during the downswing.

Most every golfer who has ever taken a golf lesson or read an article describing the proper posture at address knows that the spine angle should be straight with an appropriate amount of bend from the hips and knees. The problem comes from a combination of not knowing how to properly get your back straight and/or having physical limitations that restrict your ability to achieve a straight back.

Let's look at an example. If someone were sitting on the edge of a chair or bench with poor posture, i.e. shoulders slumped over, back rounded and head forward, what would you suggest in order to correct their posture? The most common verbal instructions would probably sound something like this:

- 1) Sit up straight
- 2) Pull your shoulders back

- 3) Stick out your chest
- 4) Bring your head back

Sound familiar? We can probably all remember our parents giving us these orders at least once during our childhood. Moreover, we probably can recall these same instructions being given to us by our golf professional during a recent golf lesson. Unfortunately, these posture-correcting tips didn't work when we were kids and they don't work very well now. These suggestions not only do not fix the problem, but they can exaggerate the postural situation because they have not addressed the root of the problem --- a *physical* inability to achieve ideal posture.

Therefore, to correct a postural problem at address, golfers need *two* essential things. First, they need to understand how to initiate the proper sequence of body motions to achieve ideal setup posture. Second, they must have the necessary combination of flexibility, strength and control to coordinate their body into the ideal setup position and maintain it swing after swing.

Club Behind The Spine Drill

Here is a simple drill to get a perfect address position every time. Please consult with your professional instructor, however, before practicing this drill to determine weather this postural technique is consistent with what they believe is right for you.

Stand tall and place a golf club behind your back with the clubface pressed against your tailbone and your head against the grip of the club (See Picture #1). Next, bend forward in such a way that the club shaft stays pressed against your belt line. Bend forward enough for the shoulders to get in line with your toes (See Picture #2). This will allow for your arms to hang freely straight down from your shoulders and ensure that you are bending from your hips.



Notice how different the setup looks by simply bending from the. If you use this club behind the spine method to practice arriving at an ideal address posture, it could not only help your game but it could also help with sound body mechanics in everyday life.

Next, try these two helpful posture-building exercises that can help improve your ability to achieve a better posture at address. Remember, however, please consult with your physician before attempting any exercise program and if you

feel *any discomfort* at any time while performing either exercise, consult your physician before continuing.

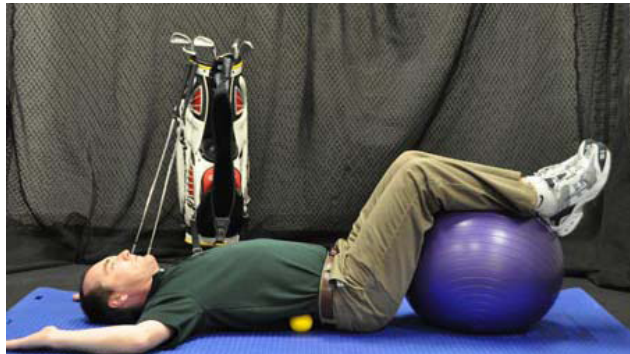
Spine Extension Stretch

Lay on your back with a small towel roll positioned horizontally across your upper/middle back. Now bend your hips and knees by sliding your feet closer to you until you can feel your low back resting flat on the floor. Next, slide your arms away from your body and bend your elbows close to 90° so your hands and arms are resting comfortably flat on the floor. If necessary, place a small towel roll under your neck and/or pillow under your head if you feel any pressure in your neck. When you achieve the proper position (See Picture #5), you should feel a comfortable stretch in your chest, front of the shoulders and in your upper/middle back. Hold this stretch for up to 3-5 minutes and repeat 1-3 times per day for 1-2 weeks. When you are finished stretching, pull your knees to your chest and roll sideways off the towel roll.



Upper Back and Abdominal Squeezes

Lay flat on your back with your hips and knees bent to 90° over a chair. Place a small towel roll under your neck and lower back. Rest your arms in a comfortable position out and away from your sides as close to shoulder level as possible and with your elbows bent 90°. After you are properly positioned, begin the strengthening exercise by simultaneously squeezing your lower abdominal, shoulder blade and upper back muscles to press your lower back flat into the towel roll, flatten your shoulder blades into the floor and lengthen/flatten the back of your neck into the towel roll. Be sure to exhale as you tighten your muscles and hold each muscle contraction for 2-3 breaths. Then relax and repeat the squeezing process up to 20 times, 1-3 times a day for 1-2 weeks or until the 20 repetitions are easy.



Remember, your overall physical posture significantly influences your golf setup posture and your setup posture significantly influences the balance, rotational flexibility, control and safety during the rest of your swing. Consequently, check with your professional instructor and have your golf posture evaluated to determine whether your swing could be helped by a postural overhaul. If it is determined that your posture could use some help, then try the simple posture

drill and exercises provided in this article. In a short time, you may find yourself standing taller, more balanced and truly “set up” for success and prepared to experience safe and enjoyable golf for a lifetime.

If you have questions about this article or want to find out more about how a **Body Balance for Performance**® customized fitness training program can help your game, please call 800-473-6211 or visit www.fitgolf.com.