

## Power Posture for Golf

By Chris Kendall, MPT and Betsy Voyles, MSPT

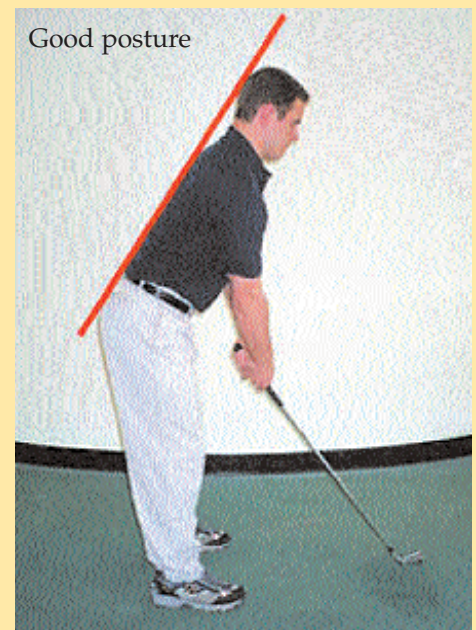
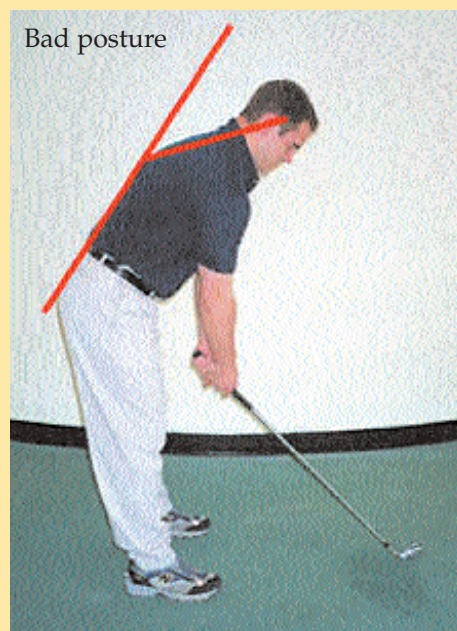
**W**e all want to have more consistency and accuracy with our game. Most teaching professionals agree that at least 90% of all swing faults can be improved with the proper posture. This means not only being able to achieve good posture at address, but more importantly, to maintain it throughout the swing and throughout the round.

Proper posture and spinal alignment not only promote better swing mechanics, but also help to prevent injuries. That's a winning combination! We all WANT to play better, but we all NEED to prevent injuries. You need to stay strong and healthy in order to keep playing your best golf.

Did you know that golf has more injuries than any other sport? Most of these injuries are the result of poor posture, tight and/or weak muscles, overusing muscles and joints, and using poor body mechanics throughout the round. When golfers do not have the correct physical tools to play the game, they have to make a number of compensations during the swing to

try to hit the ball consistently. This is the main reason why golf is so difficult! The goal is to improve each golfer's body so that they do not have to compensate for their physical limitations.

Your address posture should be rock solid and balanced with your body positioned so that your ears, shoulders and hips are aligned. You should be able to hold a golf club along your back with contact at your sacrum, spine, and the back of your head in your set-up position.



This good spine angle allows your body to move much easier throughout the swing, and allows your body to move the way it was designed to work. A good analogy that we like to use is if you bent the shaft of your golf club around a tree, would you continue to use it? Certainly not! You would get the shaft replaced with a STRAIGHT shaft, so why do most golfers continue to play with their backs in this faulty, BENT position?

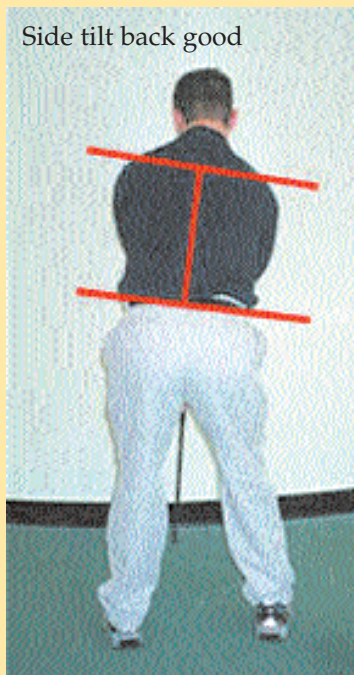
In a good set-up, you should be bent forward from your hip sock-

ets, not from your back. Your shoulder blades should be pulled down and back to open up your chest and allow your shoulders to work from their strongest position. This also allows your hands to stay relaxed directly under your shoulders. Your lower abdominal muscles are your powerhouse and need to be strong and activated throughout the swing. They also support your back, pelvis, and hips.

Proper posture at address also requires a side tilt of your body. Most teaching professionals will agree that you want to maintain a straight spine angle with your shoulders and hips parallel to each other. Think of your body as a capital letter "I". Your shoulders are the top of the "I", your hips are the bottom of the "I", and your spine is the straight line connecting the top and bottom lines.

For right-handed golfers, your right hand is lower on the club, correct? How do you maintain this letter "I" when you grip the club? Most golfers will side bend their spine to the right instead of keeping it straight. This can eventually cause a lot of strain to the low back, which is the number one injury in golf.

As the picture illustrates, the spine stays straight when you pivot through your hips instead of your spine. Maintaining the "I" will make you a more powerful



and consistent ball striker. Why? Because you are moving from a powerful, athletic position; not from a side-bent, injury-promoting position. This side tilt move is great because it sets you into a pre-loaded position so that you can more easily transfer your weight onto your right side in the back swing.

Some simple thoughts for attaining and maintaining proper posture:

1. Always try to be one inch taller than you actually are. This will automatically start to strengthen your abdominal and shoulder blade muscles to support a strong, stable posture.

2. Try not to let your chest and bellybutton get closer together.

This is a great tip to pay attention to not only in your golf posture, but also sitting at work every day. Most of the activities that we do during the day are forward activities where it is very easy to round the back and shoulders into a weak, "bent golf club" position.

Now we know the correct posture and body mechanics to utilize for golf, so why don't we see every golfer at the driving range in the correct position? Well, it's simple, most people cannot physically assume or maintain the positions we have discussed above. Each golfer's physical STRUCTURE will govern how they FUNCTION while playing golf. So if a golfer is lacking flexibility and strength in certain key areas then they will have to change their structure (improve the strength and flexibility limitations) if they want to improve their function (lower golf scores with less risk of injury).

We are going to show you two flexibility exercises that are typically needed for golfers to begin to change their structure to improve the address position.

The first area to focus on is tight hamstring muscles. Most golfers have tight hamstrings so when they attempt to get into the straight spine, athletic address position, these tight muscles will pull their

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seat underneath them because of the muscle's attachment to the pelvis. Because of this, the only way to then get the club to the ground behind the ball is to round the back and shoulders into a weak, faulty position.


So let's stretch the back and hamstrings out! Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder width, place a club on the ground in front of you with both hands on top of the club. Squat slightly so your hips and knees are bent. Keep your back flat and begin to sit back toward your heels. Push the club out away from you as you straighten your elbows. You should feel a stretch in your back, shoulders, and along the back of your legs.

You can also move the club to each side to feel a bigger stretch along your side muscles.

The next stretch is great for stretching the front of your chest and shoulders. Like the hamstrings, these muscles, when tight, do not allow the optimal spine and shoulder position at address. To stretch these muscles, move your elbows out to your sides to shoulder height with palms facing outward. Open your chest and shoulders by pulling the shoulder blades back and down while moving the elbows down slightly.

Hold these stretches for 30 seconds to one minute taking deep breaths to allow maximal muscle stretch. These flexibility exercises should be done daily to get the best

results (they should also be used as part of your warm-up before practicing and playing).

These two flexibility exercises will begin to help you achieve the ideal posture at address and maintain it throughout your golf swing. We hope these exercises and the information about the proper spine position at address help you! Remember, the path to lower scores and more enjoyment with your golf game is directly related to changing your physical structure to allow your body to perform optimally for you. Call Body Balance for Performance at (312) 455-9691 or (847) 441-8799 if you have any golf fitness questions or if you would like more information about our golf fitness programs. 

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