

Set Up for Success

The “Physical Factors” Contributing to a Proper Address Posture

By: Paul Callaway, PT, PhD

Failing to achieve the proper setup position is very common among golfers of all ages and ability levels. Most professional instructors will admit that the majority of their student’s swing motion inconsistencies start with incorrect posture at address. Moreover, a poor setup position at address significantly contributes to excessive physical stress throughout the full swing and the potential for injuries.

The most common mistake during the set up is ‘bending’ from the wrong places. Most golfers tend to bend from their waist and/or mid-back instead of from the hips and knees. This is known as spinal flexion. The stresses placed on the soft tissues and joints of the lower back (lumbar spine) from a prolonged or excessive bent spine at address are well documented in the medical journals. However, most golfers do not realize what effect this incorrect position has on their swing mechanics and/or injury potential.

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 interferes with optimal swing motion along the swing plane.

When a golfer bends too much from the mid-back (thoracic spine) at address, this positioning greatly affects their static balance during the address position as well as their dynamic balance throughout the entire swing. Statically, their center of gravity moves excessively to the heels. Dynamically, they are forced to make adjustments wherever possible to maintain balance during the swing that challenges their ability to consistently move their body, hands and club in the proper swing plane.

A rounded thoracic spine and/or excessive bend in the hips/knees at address also interfere with the natural ability for the spine and hips to rotate completely. The more ‘bend’ (flexion) the spine and hips have at address the less they will rotate during the full swing. The resultant lack of rotational ability in the spine and hips forces an excessive amount of leg, pelvic and/or torso motion during the full swing. The most typical ‘cause and effect’ swing flaws include lateral swaying (away from the target) of the hips and elevation of the head, torso (loss of spine angle) and arms (loss of swing plane) during the backswing.

Extreme losses of spine angle during the end-phases of the complete backswing lead to unbalanced weight shift and spine tilt toward the target. This common swing flaw is known as a “reverse pivot”. This end position at the top of the backswing lends to an “over the top” (outside to inside) and “casting” (early release) forward swing path that is most demonstrated by golfers who suffer from fading and/or slicing the ball.

The “reverse pivot” swing flaw also creates tremendous “shear” forces in the vertebrae of the lower back and the cushion-like, cartilage spacers between the vertebrae known as intervertebral discs. Golfers who have physical limitations causing a poor address posture and limited rotation throughout the full swing will remain predisposed to performing these typical swing flaws. Moreover, they will ultimately experience injuries to their lower back, neck, shoulders, elbows or wrists.

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The solution, therefore, is to ‘identify’ and then ‘correct’ the physical factors leading to postural problems at address. To accomplish this, golfers need *two* essentials:

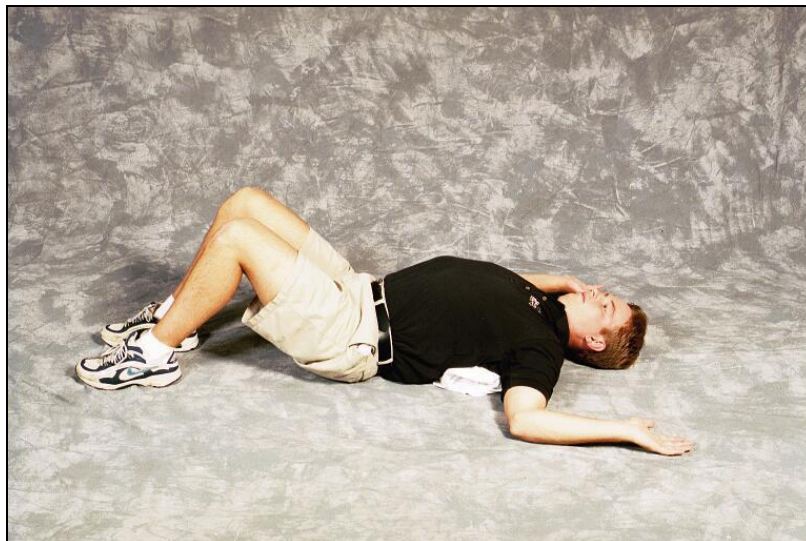
- (1) Input from an experienced PGA/LPGA instructor as to how to initiate the proper sequence of body motions to achieve ideal setup posture.
- (2) Input from a golf-specific fitness expert who can help the golfer attain the necessary combination of flexibility, strength and control to coordinate their body into the “ideal” setup position and maintain it swing after swing.

The following are three *examples* of exercises that could help a golfer physically achieve proper posture at address.

Note: Please consult with your professional instructor and fitness expert before attempting these exercises to make sure that these exercises are right for you.

1. Spine Extension Stretch

Lie 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 #1), 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.



(Picture #1)

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2. Upper Back and Abdominal Squeezes

Lie 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° (See Picture #2).

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 50 times, 1-3 times a day for 1-2 weeks or until the 50 repetitions are easy.



(Picture #2)

3. Club Behind the Spine Drill

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 #3). 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 #4). This will allow for your arms to hang freely straight down from your shoulders and ensure that you are bending from your hips.

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Picture 3



Picture 4

Consistently practicing these sample exercises could help your game and help improve your sound body mechanics in everyday life. Remember, however, please consult with your fitness expert and/or physician before attempting these or any other exercise program.

In summary, your overall physical posture significantly influences your golf address 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 you might want to try these simple posture reeducation exercises. In a short time, you could find yourself standing taller, more balanced and truly “set up” for success to enjoy safe and consistent golf for a lifetime!

*If you have any questions about golf injuries or other physical performance factors related to golf, please contact, **Paul Callaway, PT, PhD**, creator of “Factor-5-Fitness” at **Accelerated Rehab Services** in Oakbrook Terrace, IL by calling **630-705-0060** or visit www.factor5fitness.com .*