

Is Your Golf Game a Poor Balancing Act?

By: Dr. Brandon Crouch

When it comes to the game of golf your feet, your stance, and your balance can make or break your game. I've seen some great golfers who have dramatically improved their game just by working on their balance. A well balanced golfer will be able to have a more fluid backswing, make a more precise and solid impact, and lastly finish the swing with more definition.

Balance is a fundamental in every single sport. To illustrate let's look at some examples. Basketball: If your feet are not balanced when you shoot the basketball you risk leaning too far forward, backward, sideways, and ultimately accuracy is affected. (This is why the "fade away" jump shot is so difficult to master.) Football: Quarterbacks must have good balance as they transfer weight from the back leg to the front leg while passing the ball. The better the stability the better accuracy, touch, and zip they can put on the ball as they throw to a receiver. We can go through this with every sport: baseball, bowling, hockey, tennis, etc. The same holds true for the game of golf. Balance is a huge deal!

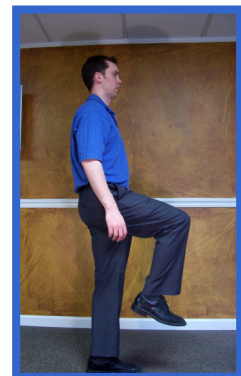
If a golfer has a poor balance it can also lead to some major swing faults such as swaying, sliding, reverse spine angles, loss of posture, etc. Although there may be some other issues at hand, balance is often a part of causing these problems.

Physical reasons you may have balance issues often come from one of these three:

1. Eyes: Your eyes visually tell your brain where you are in space. It tells your brain what is up and down and if there is a problem with your eyes it can affect your balance.
2. Ears: Your inner ears have canals which contain fluid that act like levels used on a construction site. Any shift in posture relays messages from these fluid filled canals to your brain letting your body know its orientation. (That's why people with inner ear infections often have poor balance or increased dizziness!)
3. Proprioception: This system is the way our nervous system helps to keep our balance. In all of your joints you have nerve receptors that tell your brain how your body is standing. It is like a GPS system for your brain to communicate with your body to let you know the exact position of every body part at all times. This is what we will test!

So, how do you know if you have poor balance? Well, your balance is often not easily seen or easily felt. To test this find a wall clock that displays seconds or grab a stop watch. (As always: Remember no exercise should be performed to the point of discomfort or pain and always consult your physician prior to beginning any exercise program. If you have a physical condition that would prevent you from performing this test or the below drills then talk with your physician first before performing them.)

TEST: Stand with your feet together and let your arms hang down by your side. Raise your right foot off the ground approximately 6 – 10 inches. Once you feel comfortable, **CLOSE YOUR EYES**.



The test begins when your eyes close. Start the stopwatch or check the clock. Try to stand there as long as you can. If you shift the position of your planted (grounded) foot or have any excessive arm swaying then the test is over. Check the clock. Now if you didn't get at least 10 seconds you have a definite problem. (Try the other leg now.)

The great news is that if you did not do so well then you can work to improve this very easily. Below are some easy steps to increase your balance and stability.

BASIC BALANCE EXERCISE DRILLS: Ironically, the easiest way to improve upon your balance is just to practice. The following drills will help you.

1. Try to stand with one foot in front of the other as though you are on a tight rope. Once you can stand in this position with no swaying or loss of balance for at least one minute then try it with your eyes closed. If you do well then progress to #2.
2. Stand on one leg just like the test you performed but leave your eyes open. You will find this much easier to do. After you can stand this way for at least one minute (trying both feet) then progress to #3.
3. Perform the Drill #2 above and this time close your eyes. (This is just like the test.) Keep working on this until you can master it for at least one minute on each leg.

(All the above drills can be done with shoes on or off)

ADVANCED BALANCE EXERCISE DRILLS:

1. Start by getting into your 5 iron golf posture. Then pull one foot off the ground holding it up behind you 6-10 inches. Try to hold this for as long as you can with both eyes open and then closed. (switch feet)
2. Start by getting into your 5 iron golf posture. After you have pulled one foot off the ground (like drill#1) try to lift your heel (the foot still on the ground) off the ground and balance yourself on the ball of your foot. This narrows your base of support and will be a big challenge. This is difficult for most people. Try this with both open and closed eyes. (switch feet)

To go into further depth you can use a wobble board and a Swiss ball to help build balance and stability. To learn more exercises to use with these you can go to www.mytpi.com.

Even if you're a great golfer you may be surprised at how difficult the above test and drills may be for you. Don't underestimate the importance of having good balance and stability on the golf course. Your entire swing is built upon your feet and your stability. Work on this and you may just see a difference in your golf game!

About the Author:

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