



The Effect of “Head Still” on the Golf Swing

Robert Neal

In years gone by (hopefully!) the adage of “keep your head still” was highly used by golf instructors (whether they be a qualified PGA professional or a friend “helping” you at the range). Many golfers have ended up doing some considerable damage to their bodies as a result of this “tip”, because of the pattern of movement that a still head promotes.

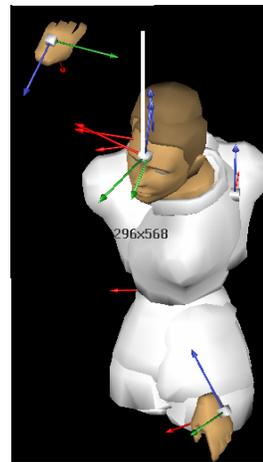
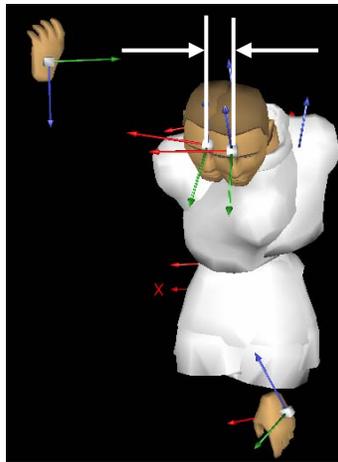
Firstly, if the head is kept still on the backswing, the only way that you can get your weight to transfer to your back foot is to allow the hips to slide away from the target. Whilst there are a number of consequences of this sway, the most important one is that the back knee has to move laterally rather than being a solid foundation on which to place the weight of the body. Furthermore, the weight tends to be more toward the lateral aspect (outside) of the right foot rather than towards the medial (inside) side of the foot.

From this position at the top of the backswing, the golfer then has the difficult task of transferring his or her weight to the lead foot but keep the head still! In order to achieve this goal, there must be a large lateral slide of the hips. The large slide makes rotation of this part of the body difficult. Thus, the left leg tends to extend and the momentum of the is “slammed” into the leading hip joint. Once again, this blocking action is necessary in order to push the considerable energy of the lower half of the body upward, toward the arms and ultimately, into the club.

Whilst the body is designed to move this way, repeated loading in such a way can lead to hip joint integrity being compromised. The professional and amateur golfers who developed this type of technique and exposed the body to many thousands of repetitions of such a pattern often developed hip soreness (e.g., Jack Nicklaus). I think that we would all agree that it would be better to avoid this type of situation.



The pictures below are from the 3D measurement system. Two images have been superimposed over one another in each picture – the first being the golfer's address posture and the second being the top of the backswing position. Notice how the golfer on the left allows his head to move laterally (10 cm) between his address position and the top of the backswing whereas the second golfer (on the right) does not move his head laterally at all!



A much better movement pattern is to allow lateral motion of the upper body (and head) throughout the swing. That is, the head should move away from the target on the backswing as the upper torso winds up and rotates on the rear axis. On the downswing, the opposite should happen as the body rotates back toward the target. The head in this case should be allowed to rotate and move toward the target. Good examples of this type of pattern of movement are Anika Sorenstam and Robert Allenby. Their heads move beautifully during the swing. However, the real benefit of this action is that the left hip is not loaded to the same extent and thus there is considerably less risk of long term, chronic injury to the hip joint.

For advice on your technique contact Dr Robert J Neal from The Golf Athlete/Golf BioDynamics/Jim McLean Golf School (www.golfbiodynamics.com).

For advice on the potential for injury contact Mr Michael Dalgleish of The Golf Athlete (www.thegolfathlete.com).