

# Get a Grip on Putting: Keep the Pressure Light and Constant

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[ZipTip: SETUP & STROKE: Get a Grip on Putting: Keep the Pressure Light and Constant](#)

Keep your grip pressure light and constant throughout the stroke to avoid snatching or casting the putter, abrupt transitions in the stroke, or tempo fluctuations, as this promotes a smooth stroke, with good accuracy in the stroke path, and consistently solid contact.

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A light, constant grip pressure is the unsung hero of good putting. You seldom hear about it, maybe because it's not as sexy a subject as "left-hand low" or the interminable debate over "lag" versus "aggressive" putting (Bor-ing!). To cut to the chase: use a light grip pressure (under one-fifth of the maximum grip pressure you are capable of) and for gosh sakes don't let it change at any point in the stroke. Let's talk about it.

## Some Theory.

"Grip" is used in three senses: 1) the putting handle; 2) the pattern of disposing the hands and fingers on the putting handle; or 3) the pattern of muscle activation in the grasping or holding of the handle. This tip is NOT about whether you should use the "reverse overlap," "baseball / 10-fingers," "interlocking," "left-hand low," "split-hand," or any other sort of grip pattern. This tip is about the degree and constancy of squeeze.

Optimal grip pressure must relate to the function of the grip. Obviously, the grip must hold the putter, but the key is to hold it so that nothing about the stroke, the putter, or the hands makes it more difficult to deliver a square putterface with the sweetspot on a straight trajectory through the center of the ball on the putt's starting line, with the appropriate force. You don't want to think about grip pressure apart from this function.

How does the optimal stroke get messed up, apart from bad aim? There are several ways.

Sometimes, the putter itself reacts to the forces of the back- and through-stroke so it veers off line or the face twists out of square. This can happen with some heel-toe weighting schemes, design oddities, or personal efforts to "tape" the putter or alter its swingweight or shaft dynamics. Robotic tests of face-balanced putters versus heel-toe weighted putters reveal this effect. This problem is exacerbated by quick strokes and strokes without smooth tempo and fluidity of motion.

Sometimes the hand-arm positioning creates a biomechanical pattern that forces the stroke path along an arcing trajectory. The most common pattern has the hands out beyond the shoulder sockets, with a resulting "gating" stroke path that fans the toe open going back and fans it closed (hopefully) back to square an instant before impact.

Sometimes the technique introduces complications that go awry. Forward pressing changes the wrists-arms relationship and it is highly unlikely that most golfers can tilt the face of the putter forward in this delofting move without also changing the face away from square or altering the setup alignment of the shoulderframe. The deleterious effect on a good stroke should be obvious. There are quite a few of the "techniques" with similar effects that should be left alone entirely.

And sometimes, the muscles of the hand tighten (they seldom get looser) during the stroke, especially at the initiation of the takeaway, the transition from back-stroke to through-stroke, and at impact. These changes can be accompanied by unevenness in the flow of the stroke. This generally results from lack of a clear notion of how to start the stroke; from fears of technical flaws (the dreaded "left-wrist breakdown"), from lack of visual and kinetic attention to the line of the stroke and putt; and from uncertainty about force.

In response to the first three causes, golfers usually try to overcome a developing problem in the stroke path or face angle with the hands and fingers. The tighter grip counteracts unwanted changes in the putter orientation and seeks to "create" stability through tightness. In the last, the hands and fingers just jump into the act uninvited. In all cases, it should never come to this.

#### [How CONSTANT Pressure Fixes These Problems.](#)

When the putter starts to veer off line or the face seems to be opening, it's too late. You shouldn't be having this problem. If you have a putter that tends to veer or twist, it has this tendency in every single putt. If you keep this putter, you need to observe this about it and set your grip in a pattern and with sufficient pressure to prevent and avoid the problem. Usually, all that is needed is a tiny bit more pressure in the left thumb tip (to prevent toe fanning). If you wait to react with grip pressure changes, each putt will call for a different response and will likely not get exactly what is needed. By sensing the putterhead dynamics very carefully in practice, you will find the minimum extra pressure and pattern that completely controls these unwanted forces.

By the same token, changes in grip pressure will introduce unbalanced forces to the putter except in the very rare case where both hands are adding pressure in a perfectly symmetrical pattern and timing (not likely!).

Rule Number One: Set and keep one grip pressure. Some instructors recommend "milking" the grip as a way to increase "feel" and reduce psychological stress. Maybe; a better use of this technique is to use "milking" to sense your pressure consciously and then to squeeze lightly down to your desired pressure, symmetrically with both hands at once. This setting of grip pressure gives you a recent benchmark pressure to maintain during the stroke. You should also find that this technique makes your stroke tempo smoother and more flowing.

Rule Number Two: Don't tighten the grip at the start of the backstroke, at the start of the downstroke, or at impact. "Grabbing" the handle in order to move the putterhead or assert reactive control is one of the main causes of bad stroke paths and face twisting. Also, if you "power" the stroke with one hand or the other, as many instructors recommend (usually the right or dominant hand), you get in the quagmire of "accelerating" the putterhead through impact. This approach to the stroke usually causes grip pressure to increase at the transition to the through-stroke and also at impact. Instead, learn what it means to "let the putterhead do the work." And the anticipation of putterface twisting at impact also causes tightening. The answer here is to make solid impact with

the sweetspot and a square face secure in the knowledge that there is never any twisting with a good impact like this. You only need to tighten in anticipation at impact if you are not capable of making this sort of impact.

Many golfers putt as if they are not convinced the putterhead is capable of getting the ball to the hole. The truth is it is hard NOT to hit past a hole on most greens for lengths up to about 10 feet, and not much force is required apart from a free-falling, "unpowered" stroke for putts out to 20 or more feet. In other words, the vast majority of putts should be utterly "hitless." Just for fun, suspend a putter very lightly between two fingers, pull the head back from a ball about 10 inches, and let go; the putterhead will free-fall into and through the ball and on most greens the ball will roll between 8 and 10 feet. Don't accelerate and don't hit; keep the pressure steady and let the putterhead impact the ball and roll it to the hole.

**Rule Number Three: Use the lightest grip pressure you can get away with.** A light pressure is not for the purpose of better "feel," whatever that is, but to make room for a stable, accurate stroke without unnecessary tension impeding the timing and fluidity of the motion. Hence, the grip should only have so much pressure as is required to hold the putter in a stable orientation as it undergoes the forces of the stroke's initiation, movement, transition, and impact. A light pressure MAKES good technique happen.

To sense the lightest possible pressure, try what I call the "Chinese handcuff" grip pressure. A Chinese handcuff is a tube created by weaving bands of straw so that when you insert your index fingers in the opposite ends and then try to retract them, the fingers pulls the tube out longer and at the same time smaller in diameter, hence trapping the fingers. The only way out is to push the tube back inward to fatten up the hole and release the fingers. You can do something similar with the putter by adopting a very light grip that emphasizes the fingerprints or crook pads of your lowest fingers on the handle (and thumbprints), and then slightly drawing your whole grip upward until the grip barely locks onto the handle and the putter starts to lift. Your grip very lightly "handcuffs" the putter.

With that grip pressure, the putter will not fall out of your hands. And with such a light pressure, you will need a stroke technique that absolutely minimizes forces on the putter that would tend to corrupt the stroke. The first thing that should disappear is forearm tension holding the putter out too far, and this will cause your arms and hands to relax and drop hanging directly beneath your shoulder sockets. The second effect if that you do not have enough pressure to use your hands to initiate the stroke, so you find another way: use the shoulderframe to power the stroke. Next, you will see you cannot move the putter too fast or stop it to change direction too quickly, because you don't have sufficient pressure to control the forces, so your stroke is nice and easy, smooth and slow. Next, you don't lift the putter going back, because you can't; instead, you keep the triangle intact and the pivot of the shoulderframe stays in line with the top of the putter and the putter shaft at all times. In the throughstroke, you get the sense that you are lightly drawing a sharp pencil in a very straight line, and this sense of straightness occupies your attention and prevents fears of impact from causing putterface twisting, so again pressure stays light. The putter is allowed to do its work as you roll the ball into the hole.

### **Make This Part of Your Game.**

You may not feel comfortable with the lightest possible pressure. That's okay, but try it in practice to know what's available. For comparison, in testing of the grip pressure of top putting pros, the grip pressure range stays between about 12% and 25% of each golfer's maximum grip pressure. Nick Price, who had the steadiest pressure throughout the

different parts of the stroke among those tested, kept a constant pressure of about 20%, or one-fifth his maximum. Amateurs typically have variable pressures in the 20-40% range, with spikes of tightening at impact and other points. Try squeezing your hands as hard as you can, and then half that hard; then reduce the pressure by half again. That's still too tight in comparison to Price's squeeze. And you can really go a lot lower than that, too -- down to about 10 to 15%. A good image is to have about as much pressure as you would need to hold a three-foot long section of broomstick handle -- not much at all. And let the putterhead do the work!

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