

How to cure the dreaded 'Chicken Wing' – the solution will stop your topped shots once and for all

By Kip Puterbaugh

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FULL SWING

HOW TO CURE THE DREADED 'CHICKEN WING'

The solution will stop your topped shots once and for all

BY KIP PUTERBAUGH

with Scott Smith



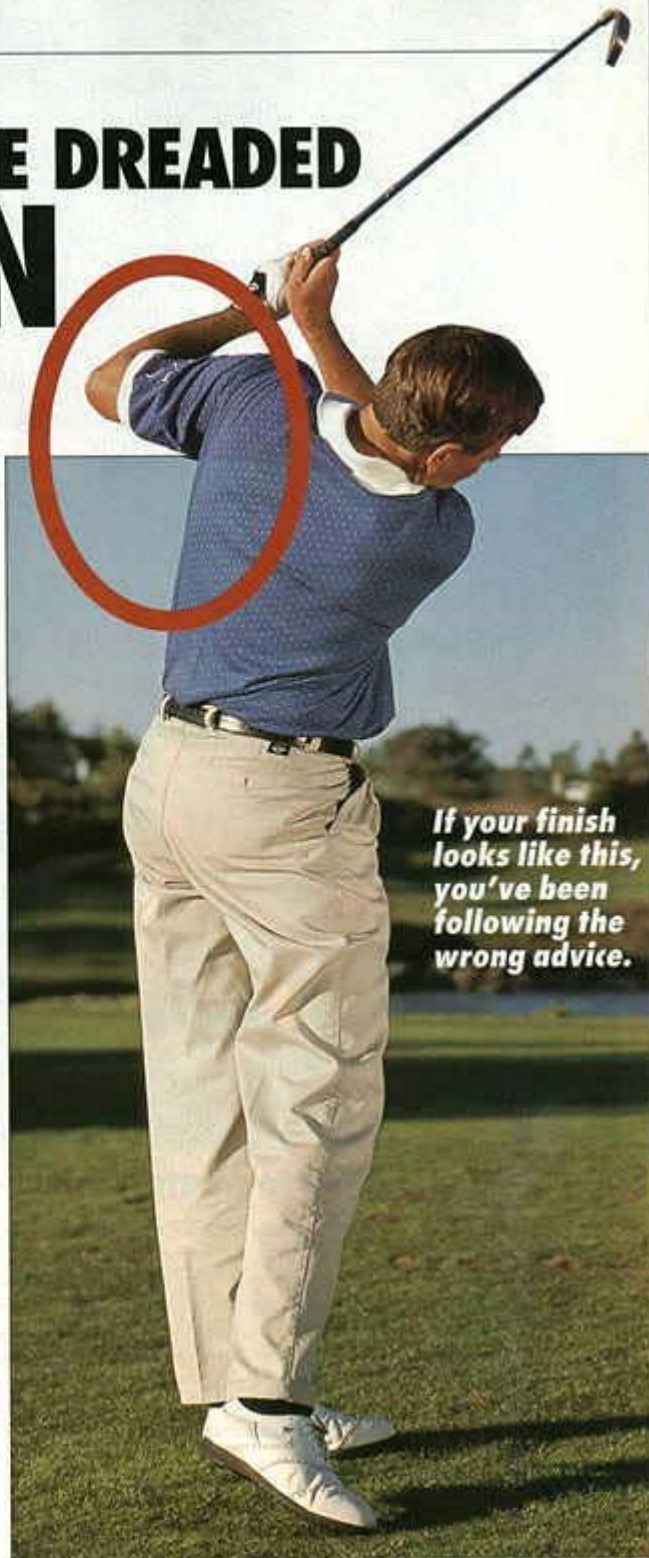
One of the biggest myths about the swing is that you top a shot because you didn't keep your eye on the ball. Invariably, the advice offered to a golfer who's just dribbled one off the tee is "you looked up" or "keep your head down." I cringe when I hear those words, because in the past decade we've had more than 8,000 students attend our golf school, and I have *never* seen one of them "look up."

I have, however, seen more "chicken wings" than I can count. Most golfers can spot this common swing flaw: Past impact, the left elbow points up rather than down. But all too few realize that golfers top shots for the same reason they find themselves in the dreaded chicken-wing position. *It's because they wrongly believe they must keep the head down and the eyes on the ball.*

The misguided effort to keep your head frozen in place prevents you from making the proper weight shift and pivot. As a result, the hands and arms outpace the rotation of the body, both on the backswing and downswing. With the body unable to clear through impact, the arms are forced to pull up into the chest. That shortens the swing arc, which causes the clubhead to skim over the top of the ball. As the ball goes hunting for gophers, the left arm continues to move up and in, forming the chicken wing.

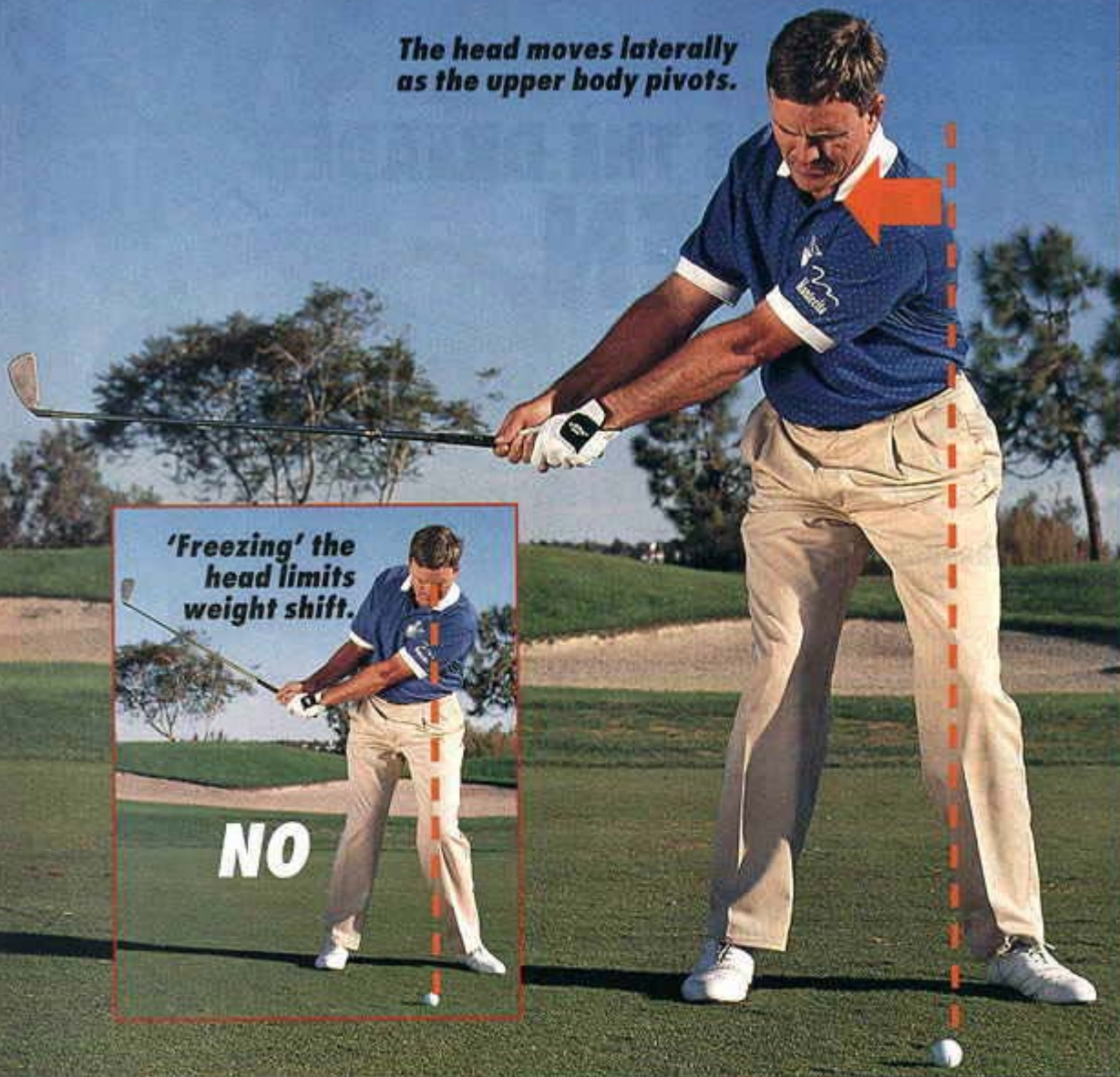
If you want to stop topping shots, fix your chicken wing. On the pages that follow, I'll show you how.

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If your finish looks like this, you've been following the wrong advice.

**The head moves laterally
as the upper body pivots.**



**'Freezing' the
head limits
weight shift.**

NO

Turn your torso to create a wider swing

Fixated with keeping his "eye on the ball," the chicken-winger begins the backswing by raising the hands instead of turning the body. This forces the arms to stay too close to the body and the left shoulder to dip, with the weight remaining on the left side (*inset*).

On the takeaway, the head must move laterally and rotate for the weight shift and pivot to occur. How much the head moves on the way back depends on its position at address. The torso initiates the backswing, with the shoulders turning first. This allows your arms to extend

fully, creating a wide, powerful swing arc.

Don't worry about cocking your wrists or you'll forget to complete your shoulder turn. The body must finish the backswing before the hands and arms do, so it can lead the way on the downswing.

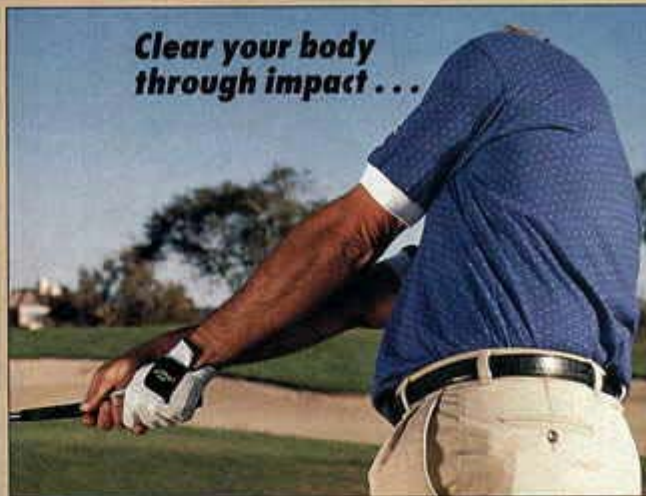


Hands trail on the downswing.

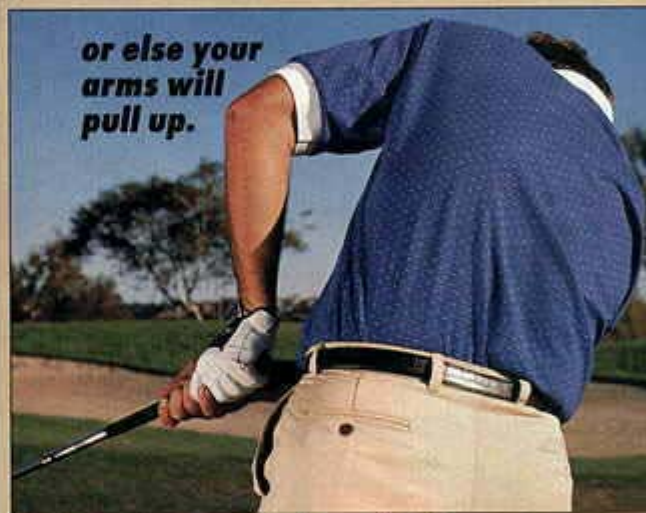
Your hips lead the way

The arms must trail on the downswing as the upper torso uncoils and the weight shifts onto the left side. This gives your lower body time to get out of the way through impact. Notice that halfway into the downswing my hips are already facing the ball; at impact they'll be about 30 degrees open, with the shoulders open about 10 degrees.

Don't think of pulling the club down with the left arm. That will cause your hands to outpace your body and leave the clubface to be open at impact. You'll then be forced to pull your arms up, topping the ball.



Clear your body through impact...

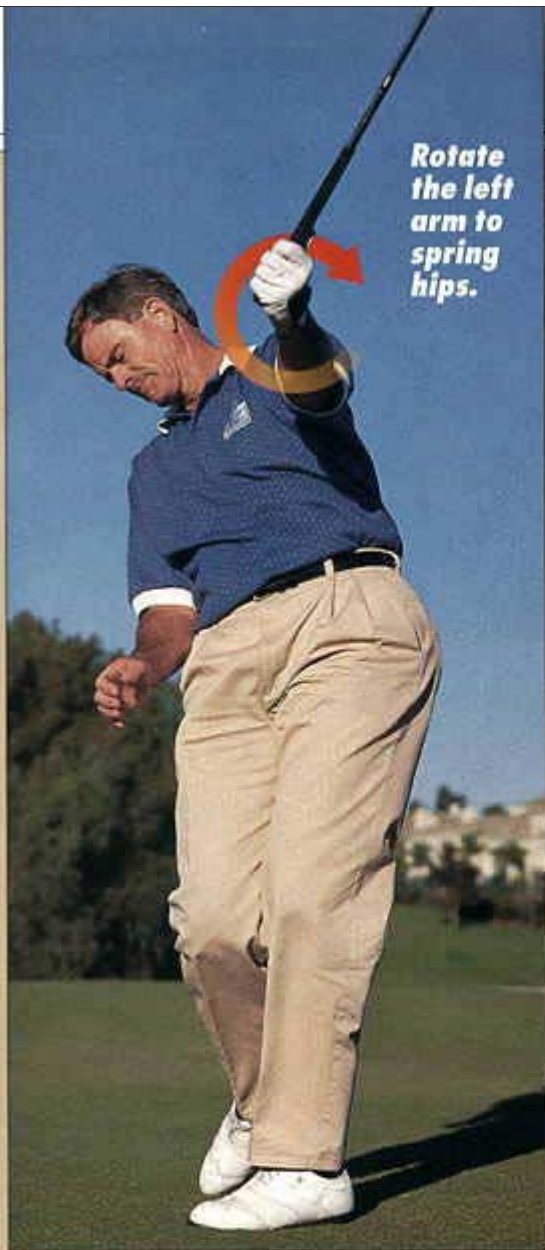


or else your arms will pull up.

The arms extend and release

Top photo: Here's how your downswing should look and feel. Stay tall and rotate, allowing your head to move with the uncoiling of the body. With your torso cleared out of the way, your hands and arms will be able to release and extend fully, so the clubhead contacts the ball squarely and at the bottom of the swing arc. Through impact, the right forearm rotates over the left forearm, so they almost touch. On the follow-through, your head will rotate and move forward so your weight can finish on your front foot.

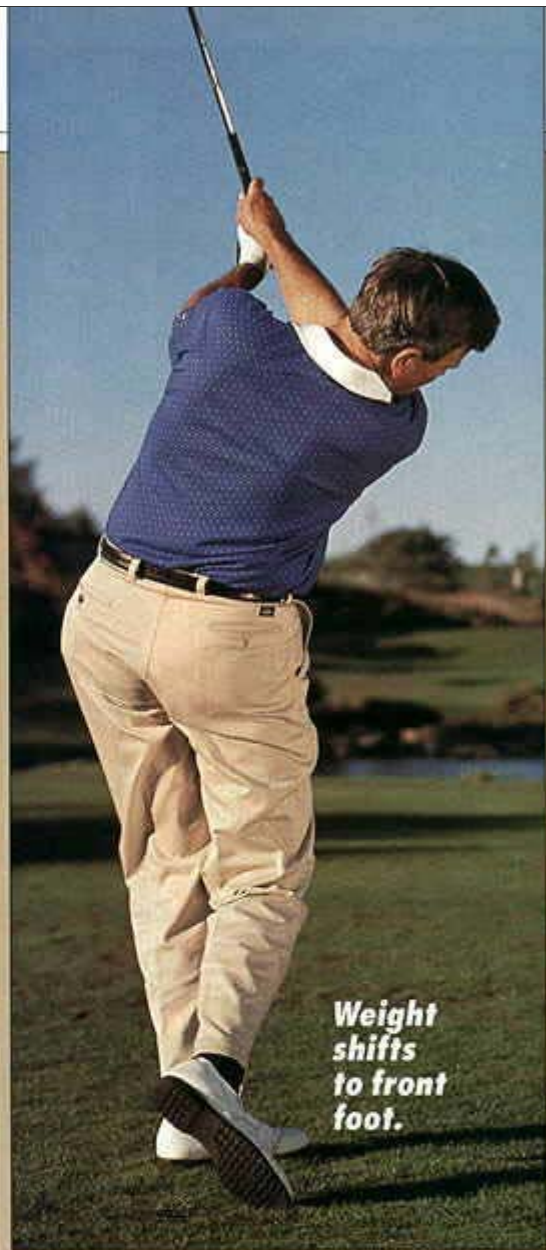
Lower photo: Keeping your head down stifles rotation of the hips and shoulders, so the hands and arms outpace the body. The right shoulder acts as an anchor, the arms having nowhere to go but up and in, leading to the chicken-wing finish.



**Rotate
the left
arm to
spring
hips.**

Learn to release the left arm

Using your normal grip, swing a middle iron back to waist height and then forward, letting go with your right hand near impact. Allow the left forearm to rotate freely on the follow-through so the left palm faces skyward. Close your eyes to feel the proper sensation. You'll find that as the left arm rotates, your hips will clear naturally. Repeat this drill several times, allowing the left arm and your hips to rotate together. Then incorporate the motion into your full swing.



**Weight
shifts
to front
foot.**

The 'two cheeks' finish

Chicken-wingers incorrectly assume the impact position mirrors the address position. Rather, the hips clearing and the weight shifting creates what we call the "two-cheeks" position at impact on through to the finish. This gives your arms room to extend fully, the clubhead contacting the back of the ball. On the follow-through, your left arm folds under the right arm, with the left elbow pointing down instead of up. No more chicken wing, and no more topped shots. ■