

STAND LIKE A MOUNTAIN, MOVE LIKE A RIVER



Articles, Interviews and
Lessons in Effortless Golf

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Jayne Storey

What Other Golfers Are Saying...

"Just thought I'd let you know that my daily practice is going well. I'm getting a lovely feeling of power in your Tai Chi-style address position; drives getting out to 250 yards, irons going ridiculously far. Also, during 2 rounds over the weekend I finally got properly into using your breathing exercises, and was delighted with the results – fantastic feeling of release through the ball in the direction I wanted it to go – so thanks so much for this, it's a keeper!" **David Young – 10 handicap, Rotterdam**

"So it happened.....I played in a competition on Saturday and won it! This is the first major competition I have ever won! I shot 1 over par and won by 2 shots. I used the Standing Meditation technique on the last 5 holes when I knew I had a good score. I can't tell you how happy I am with the way I was able to control my emotions when the pressure was on, not least of all when I birdied the last the hole by sinking a 25ft putt". **Jeremy – 7 handicap, Oxfordshire**

"I played 9 holes last Friday with no mechanical thought, only your swing feelings – focus on my navel, empty chest and rooted in my feet – and shot my best score of the year for 9 holes a 42. I only had 3 less than optimal swings and even those were good misses!!! Clearing my mind, trusting my mechanics, and feeling my feet throughout the swing made a big difference! Thank you and I will keep you posted on my progress". **Jay Platt, BACKtoGOLF, Physical Therapist, Texas**

"As a golf professional with more than 30 years of coaching experience, I can confirm that the benefits to be gained from Chi Performance GOLF are immediate, permanent and far reaching". **Peter Millhouse, Head Coach, La Reserva de Sotogrande**

"Chi Performance GOLF will soon be as fundamental to the game as the grip and set-up". **Michael Wharton-Palmer, 9 time Arkansas State title winner**

"Using her vast experience as a Tai Chi instructor, Jayne has developed an inventive golf specific programme that will allow you to bridge that all important gap between the driving range and taking your 'A' game to the 1st tee". **Mark Janes, Director of Instruction, Mark Janes Golf Academy, Essex**

"I have played professional golf for 35 years on all the world's stages and been fortunate enough to have won 5 times internationally. Having recently discovered Jayne Storey and Chi Performance GOLF, I believe my winning days again are just around the corner. This is powerful stuff for those who commit to put in the practice!" **Jeff Hawkes, European Tour Player, European Masters Champion**

"Dear Jayne, I was fascinated to learn more on how your Tai Chi methods and Mr Nicklaus's philosophy on the game have similar traits. Thank you again for introducing this new approach to us and for your creative thinking". **Andrew O'Brien, V.P. Nicklaus Marketing and Communications**

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Disclaimer: **Chi Performance GOLF** involves mentally and physically demanding exercises and some risk may be involved. Readers of this material practising the exercises shown agree not to hold Jayne Storey responsible for any injury sustained during the course of training. Please note it is advisable to check with a medical practitioner before beginning any new exercise programme.

The Golf International Interview (2009)

Q: Can you tell us a little bit of your background, and how you made the link between T'ai Chi and Golf?

I've been practising T'ai Chi for nearly 25 years and have been teaching full-time since 1997. Around 2002, I turned my attention towards working predominantly with athletes, particularly golfers and I'm pleased to say that a few years later, my coaching method **Chi Performance GOLF** was accepted as one of a number of innovative approaches that now forms part of the PGA's Professional Development Programme.

T'ai Chi is an art which is based on the philosophy that stillness is the master of motion. In T'ai Chi the mind sets the intention for the movement and the body responds to the mind's intent. We call this the Yi (intent) moving the Chi (energy).

Also, in T'ai Chi we use our body in a particular way, as the practitioner seeks to empty the upper body, relaxing and releasing muscular tension while developing a strong root in the feet and legs. We say, "Stand like a mountain, move like a river". In effect, this is what all golf coaches are getting at, when they say that a good swing is the result of the bigger muscles of the lower body (glutes, quads) leading the motion of the downswing, with the upper body following. David Leadbetter expressed it best as "The dog wagging the tail, not the tail wagging the dog!"

I got into golf myself a few years ago, when I realised that everything we're trying to do in the martial arts and all the ways we have of developing our mind~body connection can be applied immediately to help the golfer gain more awareness, which of course is the only way to guarantee improvement.

In the martial arts we spend a lot of time standing still. This is an art in itself – called I Chuan (mind boxing) – and it's fair to say that if a person lacks stillness, or the ability to remain still, they will generally lack awareness and with a lack of awareness can come the inability to really feel what's going on in the swing. In fact, the golfer will only really start to reach their potential as a player when they can narrow the gap between what they think they're doing in their swing and what they're really doing – and the key to this is awareness.



Q: Chi Performance GOLF sounds very dynamic. What are its influences?

One of my biggest influences is **Jack Nicklaus**, who said that “**golf is played with the feet**”. He explained further by saying that the golf swing starts in the feet, moves up the legs, into the waist, and then down the arms and into the hands. The club is the last thing the golfer needs to be concerned with, as it responds entirely to what the body is doing and the body responds to what the feet, legs and waist are doing.



This immediately struck a chord with me as Yang Cheng Fu (pictured), one of the most famous of all T'ai Chi masters, actually wrote that “**T'ai Chi is rooted in the feet, moves through the waist and is expressed in the hands**”. So immediately, you can see the parallels between the two arts.

You're right to say that **Chi Performance GOLF** is a very dynamic system, as this ground force energy (“golf is played with the feet”) results in an extraordinary and effortless amount of power. In fact, there's even a golf shoe manufacturer who's unique selling point for their shoes is that the “power comes from the feet”.

In T'ai Chi we use ground-force energy (Peng) to use the energy of the Earth rather than our own limited physical strength to move an object. In the case of the martial artist, this would be your opponent – for the golfer, obviously this is the ball.

You can imagine what ground force energy is like if you stand with your back against a wall while trying to push a heavy object. With the immovable force of the wall behind you, your body is capable of using far more strength than if you relied on muscle power alone. So in golf, substituting the wall for the ground, the more a golfer can become rooted in the feet, the further they will hit the ball and with a lot less effort.

Q: What aspects of a golfer's game do your methods benefit?

There are two main areas where I believe **Chi Performance GOLF** can benefit golfers the most, and they are the mental game and what I call ‘performance biomechanics’. We've touched a little on the use of the body in T'ai Chi and it's definitely this whole area of stillness and grounding that is the most important in terms of the golfer using their body more efficiently and developing an acute level of awareness.

Q: What are the similarities and differences between your methods and, say, more traditional methods?

The biggest difference is that I ask golfers to put away their clubs when they first start training with me. Only after they have mastered some basic principles of **Chi Performance GOLF** “empty-handed” can they then apply it, first to short strokes like putting and chipping and later to the full swing. My whole methodology is about working with the golfer’s body and breathing, so they learn to stay relaxed and be centred, even under pressure – if they can do this, their swing will be authentic, natural, easy and be endlessly repeatable.

Q: Do you have to be a top athlete to perform the exercises?

No, they are simple principles that can be learned and practiced by anybody, and the benefits are pretty much instantaneous. You can practice the principles two or three times a week, for between 20 and 40 minutes per session.

Q: Can you perform Chi Performance just before a game?

Absolutely, but you would strive to make the drills part of your weekly routine first, as the skills need to become part of your mind and body and can’t just be pulled from the bag along with your clubs on the morning of the game! I take all my athletes through a progressive training programme of practicing the exercises at home, then learning to practice while preparing to play, and then practicing while actually playing.

Q: What about the mental aspect of your teaching? How similar is it to sports psychology?

Chi Performance GOLF is a much simpler and more direct approach to helping the golfer master key mental game skills. I’m not against sports psychology at all but even positive thoughts are still thoughts and leave the golfer in the realm of the mind, when it’s really best to be centred in the body.

Martial artists take the view that the mind, body and breath are one entity, so in **Chi Performance GOLF**, when we train the body, for instance to gain rooting power through Standing Meditation, we are simultaneously training the mind to acknowledge distractions (like the internal dialogue) without giving them energy or attention.

Certainly the skills that can be developed from **Chi Performance GOLF** will enhance the techniques of sports psychology and give an extra dimension to gaining fundamental skills like attention control, relaxed concentration and the ability to stay calm under pressure.

Power Training

"Stillness is the master of motion".

Wang Xiang Zhai – Founder, Great Achievement Boxing

I recently spoke to a golf professional who had been suffering from acute over-analysis of his putting technique made all the more unbearable when he looked up to see a young girl of about 12 years, putting effortlessly and sinking the ball into the cup every time. Upon asking her what she was thinking about...the girl replied, just getting the ball into the hole!

I'd like to share a similar situation that occurred within the world of kung-fu, in Beijing in the 1940's. By the way, the term kung-fu can be translated as hard work or more precisely, the time and energy spent mastering a craft or skill, so yes, golf is a form of kung-fu!

Wang Xiang Zhai, founder of a revolutionary style of kung fu called Great Achievement Boxing or Mind Boxing felt that most kung fu practitioners were putting the cart before the horse, in that they were obsessed with outward forms and patterns of movement and spent very little time developing awareness and thus lost the ability to react spontaneously to a given situation.

Wang Xiang Zhai did away with the traditional repetitions of movement patterns (kata's) and took a journey into the heart of stillness, basically standing still for hours at a time learning to prepare his mind to lead action through intent and his body to obey.

Standing Meditation trains the awareness and allows the mind and intention to develop and the body to rediscover its innate ability for natural movement. As you know from your own golf swing, any conscious movement is preceded by intention and the greatest shots you've ever hit come when intention and action are one and the same.

Wang Xiang Zhai's methods became extremely controversial and were perceived by many as an insult to their traditions, a situation not altogether helped when he placed an advert in the newspaper inviting all martial artists to meet with him for a fighting contest. Numerous practitioners accepted the challenge and many, many subsequent encounters later, Wang Xiang Zhai's methods were named Dachengquan which means Great Achievement Boxing. His techniques are still taught to this day and indeed, at the first T'ai Chi lesson I attended in 1987, we were made to stand still for 20 minutes!

Golf as Kung-Fu

Try bringing this kung-fu training into your golf, a sport where every shot starts from a point of stillness and demands explosive and spontaneous yet controlled movement, and you will feel more comfortable, relaxed, grounded and committed to action each time you set up to the ball.

Universal Post

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width wide
- Unlock your knees and sink your weight into the front of your heels
- Gently draw in your navel and allow your tailbone to unfurl gently, neutralizing the pelvis
- Empty your chest and relax your shoulders
- Hold your hands at eye level, as if you are holding onto a balloon
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and elbows pointing downwards
- Imagine the crown of your head is suspended by a thread
- Gaze gently into the distance and quietly focus on your breathing
- Stand still for 20 minutes, repeating 3 times per week



What to expect

As an awareness exercise Standing Practice is first and foremost a method of preparing the body's three springs – foundational (legs), torso (centreline) and sphere (arms) – for unified action directed by the mind.

In other words, as you stand you learn to relax and become more aware of your body and this in turn allows for greater freedom of movement, as the upper body becomes more relaxed, supported and under the influence/direction of the legs and feet.

Swing Drills

"Stand like a Mountain, move like a River".

Tai Chi principle

Have you ever noticed how the likes of Tiger and other professional tour players make the golf swing look so easy and effortless? Yet, when you try to re-create this in your own game, the results can be far from satisfactory?

Accomplished masters of any art, from golf and other sports to musicians and indeed martial artists, all seem to make their craft look effortless to the untrained eye, but why? Perhaps by delving again into the world of kung-fu, we can begin to understand the process of mastery and take steps to accomplish this ourselves.

All martial arts, no matter what the style, start out being external (i.e. relying on brute or muscular force) because they use segmented strength and an excess of movement. The process of mastery is defined precisely by the mastery of the economy of motion and the transformation of external or segmented strength into internal or integrated strength. Taken to its highest level, the martial arts master transforms all movement into stillness as the use of strength becomes invisible.

The uniqueness of the internal styles such as T'ai Chi is that right from the beginning of training these schools make the end product of the developmental process - stillness and awareness - the fundamental practice of their disciplines. Hence the emphasis on Seated and Standing Meditation (Zen or Ch'an and I Ch'uan respectively) to quieten the mind, develop high level connection or joint-stacking (integrated strength) for increased power and of course, the release of explosive force (Fa Jing).

The transformational process really begins with understanding that any improvements to your golf will be the result of things you discover for yourself – about the way you move, breathe, think, stand etc. As Fred Shoemaker writes in "Extraordinary Golf", improvement can only ever be the product of awareness and awareness means quietening the mind and starting the process of self-observation.

Ok. Enough philosophy! But golfers who put this into practice and commit to developing awareness through Meditation have seen great improvements to their game in relatively short periods of time. One client reduced his handicap from 15 to 11 within six months of taking up Meditation practice, as he started to develop a greater feel for his swing and produced his own learning and improvements from the new-found calmness of his mind.

Let me share with you now a few swing drills which I've developed, based on the art of T'ai Chi, to help you take the emphasis off swing thoughts and start the transformational process of getting in touch with your inner swing.

Drill # 1 **Chi Kung Swing** *(Breathing into your centre)*

Swing naturally while focusing only on your breathing. Lower your awareness to your t'an tien – (your body's natural centre of gravity, located approximately 2" below the navel) and take a few deep breaths. Keep your shoulders down, empty your chest, relax your jaw and find your feet. Set-up to the ball, breathe in while you move to the top of your back-swing, and then exhale all the way through to your finish position. Focus entirely on your breathing, exhaling fully as you hit through the ball, and trust your swing.

Drill # 2 **Wu Chi Swing** *(Holding your posture)*

Find a 'problem' area with your swing; something you are striving to perfect. It could be making sure your hands are ahead of the club-head before impact or keeping your right elbow down at the top of your back-swing. Get into the correct position and freeze-frame for at least 30 seconds, holding the position and memorising the movement with your mind and body. Remember to relax and breathe into your t'an tien while holding the position. When 30 seconds becomes easy, try for a minute, 90 seconds and so on; the emphasis should be on relaxed strength, such that if a buddy came and gave you a gentle nudge, you wouldn't fall into a crumpled heap in your driving bay, but would remain grounded and balanced.

Drill # 3 **T'ai Chi Swing** *(Slow motion)*

Set-up to the ball and take a few deep breaths into your t'an tien. Swing as slowly as possible and stay relaxed throughout the swing, breathing normally. Take at least one minute to complete your swing, without resisting the slowness or anticipating the finish. Take your time and fully engage with all aspects of the swing, from shifting your weight, turning your waist, and raising and lowering your arms. When you can comfortably take one minute to perform your swing, try it with your eyes closed! This will really test your balance and control.

Try each drill "empty-handed", just using the motion of your body, without a club in your hands, and then take a few swings with a club, but without attempting to hit the ball. Note your feedback on a scale of 1 – 10, 1 being poor and 10 being excellent. Only when you have done this, start to hit balls with your favourite iron and/or driver.

Swing Thoughts versus Swing Feelings

As anyone who's ever practised the Eastern art of Meditation will tell you, it's almost impossible to have a completely silent or empty mind. The mind is naturally restless and scientists aren't even sure how thoughts occur, only that they are electrical impulses in the brain. However, it's possible for every golfer who is serious about improving their game, to use this ancient art to help stop the incessant chatter of the internal dialogue, which ultimately sabotages even your best efforts around the course.

Rather than taking the mind away from the body, in order to focus on technical aspects of the swing and with it, individual and isolated segments of the body (head, shoulders, wrists and so on) Eastern philosophy and in particular, the martial arts, would suggest we simply aim to centre the mind in the breathing, relax the upper body and root into the ground, thus developing a strong, athletic and above all balanced posture.



<http://zesungkang.tumblr.com/>

I am reminded as I write this of the Korean art of horseback archery. In days gone by this of course was part of war-craft, but now it is a form of martial art where the rider shoots at a fixed target, while thundering along on the back of a stallion. So what do you think the archer is focused on while shooting his arrows?

Well, he'll obviously look at the target but doesn't have the time to talk to himself too much about it and certainly thoughts of missing the target never enter his head. Instead, he is taught to focus on his posture, maintaining a rooted yet upright position in the saddle; and to dispel doubts, anxiety, fear of failure and so on, he concentrates his mind at the navel (t'an tien) breathing deeply and slowly, with his mind fully aware of breathing in and breathing out.

In Zen Meditation, posture again is seen as the practice itself. When one sits down to meditate and keeps the body strong but relaxed, the mind centred at the navel, one automatically recreates, within moments, the feeling of peace and serenity that is integral to the art.

In kung-fu, the art of stance keeping is seen as more valuable, powerful and integral to fighting success than repeating endless patterns of movement (kata's). The famous Samurai, **Miyamoto Musashi** who wrote the treatise on swordplay "**A Book of Five Rings**" practiced only his 'ready-posture' - that is, the moment before the sword is drawn from its scabbard - and would stand like this for hours on end mastering rooting, relaxation and the mental intent needed to draw his sword, cut down his opponent and return his sword to its sheath all in the time it took him to breathe in and breathe out. History tells us that no one who took up arms against Musashi ever lived to tell the tale.

If we accept the Eastern way has some valuable insights to offer, then we can understand that swing thoughts instead need to become swing feelings, connected to the body as a unit, focusing on the key postural points posture of address, while at the same time staying focused on the breath, thus denying self-limiting and self-hindering thoughts to sabotage and undermine us.



Set-up is king.

Jack Nicklaus, the greatest golfer of all time (not just because of his record of winning 18 majors but also taking into account the number of times he came second or third in tournaments over three decades) said that if you set up to the ball well you can virtually guarantee a good swing, yet if you set up poorly, no matter how well you swing, you won't make good contact with the ball and you won't get the results you desire.

As one of my students puts it, "When you swing well you know what you've done; when you swing badly, you think about what you're going to do!"

So focusing on key postural points of rooting, relaxation and awareness of your breathing should become integral to the way you address the ball and will reap far greater dividends than trying to consciously control the physical and mechanical aspects of the swing.

Swing Feelings for Balance and Power

1. Empty your chest

Emptying or hollowing the chest is the first key to developing rooting as it relaxes the upper body, freeing the neck and upper portions of the spine, releasing the shoulders and emptying the lungs – you'll find that exhaling deeply is a natural part of this process which releases pent up energy/tension in the torso, arms and neck.

2. Lower your mind to navel

Lowering your centre of awareness, by concentrating your mind at the navel (t'an tien), is a key focus in Meditation and extremely useful for your golf. Eastern philosophy states that your mental intent has the effect of leading or harnessing your energy...you may recognise this in a negative way when you miss a shot during a game and as your mind focuses on your perceived failure, you start to recall other misses and before you know it you've talked yourself into making a bogey on the next hole. Harnessed correctly, your mind can focus your energy in a way that encourages relaxed concentration.

As you gently focus on your navel, you will find that you will start to breathe more slowly and deeply and this in turn sends increased oxygen along with your 'feel-good' chemical signals (endorphins) to your brain.

3. Sink into the feet

Your final point of focus is your feet, which you may now be more aware of, and actually be able to feel the soles of your feet in contact with the earth. Again, your energy will follow your thinking, so if you focus on your feet you will feel more stable and rooted. Oftentimes when coaching a client, I ask them to address the ball and then give them a little nudge in the sternum, only to watch them fall backwards into the driving bay! With just a few moments practicing the drill – *empty the chest, mind at the navel, feet firmly on the ground* – it becomes impossible for me to budge my client from their stance, which just shows how much more balanced and rooted they are and of course, they hit the ball much further too!

Breathing to Win!

Phrases like peak performance, the *flow*-state and “the zone”, all refer to the bursts of spontaneous excellence experienced every so often during a round - and describe a state where your swing is fluid, effortless and powerful and there is a marked absence of internal doubts about your ability.

What we know about this experience is the more you try to create it (in other words, the harder you try to hit the perfect shot) the less able you are to swing smoothly and with confidence.

What we know of the zone is that the golfer in this state is totally focused, his actions are automatic and intuitive and he/she doesn't take in any information from the outside environment or talk to him/herself at all about the game, opponents, weather conditions or personal performance level.

Action and awareness therefore merge when the golfer becomes totally absorbed in what they are doing – when they have the skills to meet the challenge and focus all of their attention on the task at hand. This total absorption or immersion in the game is one of three core components of the zone/*flow*-state.

These are: **Skill + Passion + Immersion**

You may also be familiar with the ‘Inner Game’ model, which states that peak performance is a natural result of **talent *minus* mental interference**.

The experience of the zone usually takes the player by surprise, as it comes at a moment of intense physical effort and mental concentration. It is almost as though golfers who push themselves to their limits often experience something like a transcendent state which some have referred to as mystical or otherworldly – a state similar to the ‘Samadhi’ experience of inner peace achieved by those who practice Meditation.

The attainment of this state makes possible superior or peak performances that seem effortless, in which the player allows his or her mind and body to excel, without any conscious interference, in the way of self-doubt, loss of confidence, nerves or stress.

So, How Can You Achieve the Flow-State?

In order to become immersed in your game, and therefore create the conditions necessary for ‘spontaneous excellence’ to occur, the conscious mind needs to be anchored in a natural process – the simplest one being to focus on the breath.

In doing so, the skills and technique you've honed through practice and experience can be allowed to manifest without desire, doubt or anxiety creeping in to wreck your game-plan. Put another way, the zone is a state in which your conscious mind/superego stops telling you why you can't make the shot and lets the rest of your mind/body get on with it!

Zen – the Doorway into the Flow-State

Commonly known as Zen, this is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese Ch'an – derived originally from the Sanskrit *dhyana* – which may be translated as Meditation or contemplation. Very simply, Meditation is the art of sitting quietly, focusing on your breathing.

Why Does it Work?

The brain undergoes subtle changes during Meditation. Research shows that Meditation can actually train the mind and reshape the brain. Tests using the most sophisticated imaging techniques suggest that Meditation can actually reset the brain, changing the point at which a fluffed bunker shot for instance raises your anxiety levels.

What the scientists discovered through these studies is that with enough practice, the neurons in the brain will re-shape themselves, and many parts of the brain responsible for taking in information, actually slow down or go off-line altogether, enabling the practitioner to have a more positive experience of themselves and detach from negative feelings and situations.

How Will Your Game Benefit?

Golfers who've made a commitment to this simple practice have reported many benefits, including feeling a greater sense of freedom and being more relaxed around the course, stopping negative thought-chains, reducing self-interference, and even better powers of visualisation.

Bringing your attention to your breath also helps to increase concentration during your pre-shot routine. Focusing on the t'an tien (see Stage Three) is ideal for helping you feel relaxed yet strongly rooted into the ground at address, as it encourages a lowering of your centre of gravity. You can also use short bursts of Meditation (a few deep breaths) any time you need to let go of poor shots.

Stages of Meditation

It is important to find which of the following stages work best for you. As a general guide, try to practice each stage for a minimum of 3 weeks. For each stage, breathe in and out through the nose, making each breath long, smooth and silent.



Stage One: Watching – Sit quietly for twenty minutes and simply be aware of yourself breathing in and breathing out. Tune into the rhythm of yourself breathing and follow each breath with what Shunryu Suzuki, author of 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind' describes as a "*warm-hearted mind*".

Stage Two: Counting – On the first breath, count one silently in your mind as you inhale and count one again silently as you exhale. Continue like this, counting up to ten breaths. When you reach ten, begin counting from one again. If you lose your place, start counting from one again.

Stage Three: T'an tien – Breathe in through the nose and when you exhale concentrate on pushing some of the breath down into the navel area (t'an tien). Of course, the breath does not actually move to the lower abdomen, but concentration on the navel will help you to produce a very composed and concentrated state of mind and experience more lower-body strength and stability.

Home Programme

A good time to practice Meditation is first thing in the morning. This helps to energize you and refreshes your mind for the rest of the day. Do not look for the 'perfect' place, which you may never find; sitting on the edge of the bath is fine, if that's the only quiet place in the house! Aim for 20 minutes, four days out of seven.

Pre-Competition

The night before a big tournament or competition it is usually quite difficult to sleep. Instead of lying there worrying, get out of bed and practice Meditation for 5 or 10 minutes and restore a calm state of mind. In the morning, practice Meditation for 5 or 10 minutes immediately upon getting out of bed. From then on do short bursts of Meditation to help maintain calmness and focus until the competition.

As the competition approaches, these 'bursts' of Meditation should be more frequent. Any panic or negative thoughts can be controlled in this way. Use short bursts too as you drive and then walk to the club house or changing area, and while lacing up your golf shoes, picking up your bag and walking out to the first tee.

During Play

As you set up for each shot, practice focusing on one or two breaths before striking the ball. It may be particularly useful to use Stage Three: T'an tien breathing, which will help to centre you physically and produce a strong feeling of stability in your lower body. Some golfers have even reported that this stage of Meditation makes them feel more powerful.

When you have finished your shot and are walking to the ball again, stay focused on your breathing. You may even like to match the rhythm of your breathing to your foot-steps.

Holding Your Nerve

Maintaining your state under pressure is the key to superior performance in all sports. Over the years I've worked with individual athletes from many different backgrounds including Masters-level swimmers, an Iron Man record-holder, an Olympic middle-distance runner, a junior Olympic snow-boarder, a GB Triathlete and a number of elite tennis-players. Each athlete either excels or deteriorates during their performance depending on one key factor...and that is breathing correctly.

"Breathing correctly is the key to better fitness, muscle strength, stamina and athletic endurance".

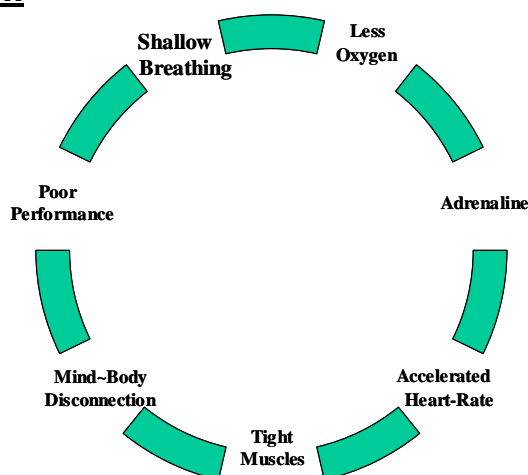
Dr Michael Yessis, President – Sports Training Institute

Another thing I've talked about many times is the Eastern concept that your mind and body are one and the same entity. If you doubt the validity of this statement just think about the phenomena of body language, the fact that we can usually tell just from the way somebody stands, sits or walks whether they are tired, anxious, elated or depressed. It's the same on the golf course. When you're feeling anxious this state usually manifests in a poor swing caused either through rushing or failing to commit to the shot.

Here's what happens when you rush the shot:

Changes in your body go something like this. You perceive a tense situation, say a bad lie after a hooked tee shot and immediately and unconsciously you start shallow breathing. Next, your chest will get a little tighter, less oxygen is fed to your brain, your nervous-system becomes flooded with adrenaline, your heart beats a little faster, your muscles tighten and this makes your whole body tense. With a tense body you are likely to rush your shot and shorten your backswing, leading to a potentially duff second shot which will only increase your sense of anxiety, ensuring you keep shallow breathing and thus continue with the ever decreasing circle of your performance ...I call it the Circle of Deterioration.

Circle of Deterioration



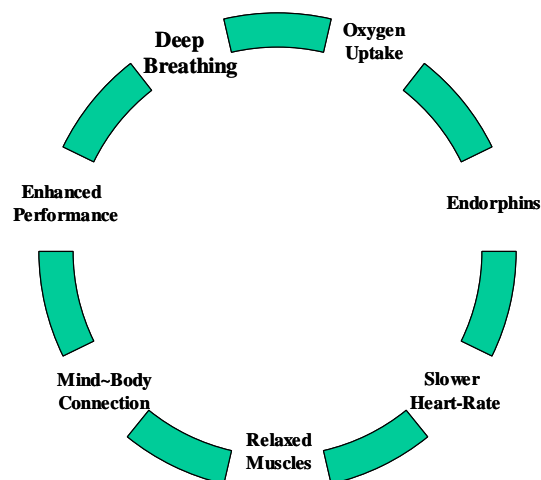
Once you accept that management of your mental state on the golf course is largely influenced by the quality of your breathing you can do something about it. Learning to Meditate, which is simply the act of sitting quietly and staying focused on the breath has helped many golfers manage their state around the course and given them the ability to remain neutral under pressure.

Here's what happens when you take a few deep breaths:

Changes in the body go something like this. You perceive a tense situation, say a bad lie after a hooked tee shot and immediately and unconsciously you start shallow breathing...but because you've been practicing Meditation you can 1. Remember to focus on your breathing and 2. Stop and take a few deep breaths.

Now, instead of allowing your innate Stress Response to take over and rule your brain, body and nervous-system for the duration of the shot, you can take conscious control of your state via your breathing. Deep breathing in turn will send more oxygen to your brain which can flood your nervous-system with endorphins, lower your heart-rate, relax your muscles, increase your mind~body connection, raise your confidence levels, and create a calm yet focused state from which to set-up and swing. Physiologists call it the Relaxation Response... I call it the Circle of Excellence.

Circle of Excellence



You play golf because you want to win. Of course you want to enjoy yourself and know that you're improving and playing to a personal standard that gives you satisfaction...but most of all you want to win games.

It's been said that in the history of this most challenging of sports, it all comes down to seconds and millimetres. However long you've played, however many lessons you've had, however many hours on the range, however much you've read, it's all about the way you manage your state when the next few seconds are all that count and where a few millimetres either way are all that separate you from victory or defeat.

Learning to love these moments instead of dreading them...learning to engage your competitive spirit instead of getting in your own way...learning to make room for confidence instead of fearing failure, really can be as simple as taking a few deep breaths.

Here's an exercise to help you remember:

Think of Meditation as a "conditioning exercise" to help you use your body's innate Relaxation Response anytime you're under pressure during a game. For the best results practice for 20 minutes, 4 days out of 7.

1. Sit upright on a hard-backed chair, your feet firmly on the ground, your palms cupped in your lap (left palm uppermost) or resting on your legs. Tuck your chin under slightly and hold the crown of your head up, as if it were held by a thread. Keep your eyes open and look slightly downwards at a distance of approx. 3 feet.
2. Relax your shoulders and empty your chest.
3. Bring your attention to your breathing, being quietly aware of the sensation, especially when you are breathing out. Do not force your breathing, just relax and breathe naturally.
4. As you continue sitting, thoughts will come into your mind and your attention will wander. This may take just a few moments! Gently bring your awareness back to your breathing and try again.
5. Continue sitting like this, bringing your thoughts continually back to your breathing, each and every time you get distracted and your mind wanders.

It's challenging for sure, but if you can make a commitment to this simple practice you can condition yourself to stay relaxed yet focused under pressure and gain a greater sense of freedom in the way you play the game.

"Using her vast experience as a T'ai Chi instructor, Jayne has developed an inventive golf-specific programme that will allow you to bridge that all important gap between the driving range and taking your "A" game to the first tee". - Mark Janes, PGA

Stop Playing “Search for a Swing”

Jayne Storey’s Chi Performance GOLF is based on simple, timeless principles which are proven to enhance your mental game and help you perform your best on the golf course. Here she explains how a simple shift in your attention can help you stop playing “search for a swing” and start playing a game you can both enjoy and win.

To deliver a fluid and powerful golf swing, especially when under pressure during a round, two vital things need to be accomplished which are rarely addressed in mental game coaching. First let’s define what pressure actually means.

Fred Shoemaker, author of “**Extraordinary Golf**” cites the fact that no matter how well a golfer is playing, a couple of bad shots in a row can change their entire experience and reduce their game to one where they are constantly on the verge of being upset. This is because most golfers bring a whole bundle of emotions with them to the first tee including “doubt, excitement, fear, key swing thoughts, desires and a lot of hope”.

So pressure, also known as stress, anxiety or a general feeling of ‘up-tightness’ can be anything from not wanting to feel embarrassed when you drive off in front of your mates, the anxiety of a corporate event when you haven’t played for several weeks or it might be having to compete with a guy who always offers you unwanted tips every time you set up.

Pressure could also manifest as the familiar “search for a swing” game that many golfers play, bogged down and confused mentally yet still wanting to try out new tips and tricks.

Jack Nicklaus said a big mistake many players make is that they try to swing like somebody else, to do what another golfer can do, rather than finding out what they can do well and sticking with it. I agree. I also firmly believe that if you could just play with the swing you have now, the next time you go out on the course you will enjoy your game a whole lot more, you will make more birdies and chances are you may even win.

So here’s how to stop playing “search for a swing” and start trusting the swing you’ve got now. First, you’ll need to quieten your **internal dialogue** and secondly, you’ll need to master your **bio-chemistry**. Both these things can be accomplished quickly and easily using the simple technique of focusing on your breathing – also known as Meditation.

Reducing the internal dialogue

Most mental game coaches will typically fill your head with various psychological techniques to help you re-frame your thoughts so that you say things to yourself that you want to hear. A typical re-frame would be instead of telling yourself something negative like "I've hooked it the last couple of times I was on this tee, I bet I hook it again this morning" you tell yourself something positive like "Ok here we go, nice tidy shot straight down the middle".

So why isn't this approach satisfactory? Well, these mental game tricks only last for a short amount of time, as the mind quickly gets used to the new dialogue and once again the swing faults creep back in. Countless times golfers have got in touch with me, as they've been unable to hit a barn door with a shovel having gone through months of leaping through mental hoops!

Filling your head with more things to remember, often over the top of too many swing thoughts is really the last thing you want to be doing out on the course. You shouldn't be **thinking about playing golf** but rather be immersed in what you're doing and getting "in the zone".

Any golfer worth listening to will tell you that they play their best shots when they have had the least mental interference. Tiger Woods has often mentioned "silence" as the thing he hears before a making a great swing. Fred Couples, when asked what he thinks about at address said "nothing" and Bobby Jones said when he played great golf he thought very little and when he played exceptional golf he didn't think at all.

Mastering your bio-chemistry

Any time you've rushed your shot preparation, as a result of feeling hurried by those around you, those on the hole behind you or by your own inability to settle-down you've been the victim of bio-chemistry.

Any time you've used positive self-talk to get confident before a game, only to feel your mouth dry and your palms get sweaty walking out to the first tee, you've been the victim of bio-chemistry.

Any time you've felt anxious, excited, fearful, worried or concerned about your swing, what you look like, how you're going to perform – you've been the unhappy victim of bio-chemistry. It's the result of adrenaline, wreaking havoc on your nervous-system, making you all the more anxious, up-tight, irritated and lacking the confidence to play your own game.

The solution is simple



Watson celebrates winning the Senior Open 2007
www.dailyrecord.co.uk

But there's a simple way of controlling both the inner voice and the negative effects of bio-chemistry.

Tom Watson summed it up the best when he said "**When I learned how to breathe, I learned how to win**".

Learning how to breathe – that is, deeply and slowly - quietens the internal dialogue and produces a 'Relaxation Response' in the nervous-system, which negates the disastrous effects of adrenaline and produces a feeling of calm.

If you can take this one principle into your game the next you time you play I guarantee you will feel confident with the swing you've got now, make more birdies and have a happier time doing it.

Bringing it into your game

Many of my clients have found their own ways to take this awareness into their game. Here's a great suggestion to help you get started. Arrive at the club 10 minutes early for your next tee time, then just sit in the car and quietly pay attention to your breathing. Either switch the radio off or if you like, listen to some classical/instrumental music in the background. This will induce your Relaxation Response, keep your inner voice to a minimum and ensure you arrive at the first tee unruffled.

As you walk and play the course the one thing you're doing constantly is breathing, so as often as you can, just 'check-in' with yourself and simply remember this fact and you'll feel so much calmer even if you play a couple of poor shots in a row.

Use this technique also when going through your pre-shot routine, when standing at address, when walking to the ball and so on. Just be aware of your breathing. You hardly need another mental game technique than this – it will calm your nervous-system, keep you neutral under pressure, stop your internal voice and allow you to trust your swing around the course for a relaxing and enjoyable game.

Ben Hogan and the Slow Motion Swing

The T'ai Chi approach used in **Chi Performance GOLF** is echoed in the practice method of Ben Hogan, who famously used a slow motion swing to develop what is arguably the most archetypal swing of them all, one which has been extensively written about and emulated more than any other.

To get a picture of T'ai Chi in your mind, just recall those images you've seen of groups of people in the park in Beijing, wearing what appear to be white, silk pyjamas and moving almost imperceptibly in slow motion.



This practice of moving slowly is adopted throughout the East, where even an everyday activity such as walking is slowed right down to become a method of Meditation in Buddhist monasteries.

So, how can this approach improve your game and where did Ben Hogan get the idea of moving slowly from?

Hogan practically invented the notion of practice in golf and his level of dedication (which is as legendary as his actual swing) resulted in Tiger Woods saying that Hogan was able to understand his swing probably more than most players will ever understand theirs.

Hogan performed a slow motion practice swing precisely because by slowing down he was able to feel, sense and become aware of what was working and what wasn't in his swing – even to the point of jumping out of bed in the middle of the night to practice in front of the wardrobe mirror as a sudden inspiration took hold, before heading out onto the range early the next day to groove his new level of understanding.

As with most Eastern techniques that were once thought of as a bit left-field, moving in slow motion has now been proven by Neuroscience to have specific benefits due to its particular effect on the brain and the mind~body connection, such that the neural connections associated with movement are known to get stronger, as more detailed and refined information becomes available to the brain to build the movement map.

As well as T'ai Chi, the Feldenkrais method and more recently Z-Health also employ the use of slow, mindful movement as a primary means to develop coordination.

Champion athletes from many sports use the slow movement approach in training sessions, notably Jonny Wilkinson in rugby and Monica Seles in tennis.

By slowing down you can sense differences in muscular effort, which in turn increases your brain's ability to correct any postural and movement imbalances.

Your proprioceptive map - the physical areas of your brain responsible for sensing and controlling movement, develops stronger neural linkages in response to slow motion activity and the resulting sensory feedback that occurs. Seen in this light, the term 'grooving' your swing really should be taken literally.

Understanding your swing by performing it slowly will help you groove a swing that is as consistent as your own signature. Constant repetition of the 1.8 seconds that make up a typical golf swing offers neither the time nor the space for you to develop the qualities of attention and awareness that are essential to improvement. Slow, gentle movement can make your internal swing map that much clearer.

The Slow Motion Swing Drill



1. Set-up to the ball and take a few deep breaths into your centre.
2. Swing as slowly as possible staying relaxed throughout the motion, breathing normally.
3. Take at least one minute to complete your swing, without resisting the slowness or anticipating the finish.
4. Fully engage with the balance and rhythm of your swing, paying particular attention to your lower-body (feet and legs).
5. Feel how your upper-body (waist, shoulders and arms) responds to your lower-body when you relax, as opposed to deliberately moving through various swing positions.

When you can comfortably take one minute to perform your swing, try it with your eyes closed! This will really test your 3D proprioception map!

The Happiness of a Well-Struck Golf Shot

Why do you play golf? It's an interesting and useful question to ask. Do you play golf for the camaraderie, social interaction, and the great outdoors? Do you play to improve and lower your scores, the thrill of winning or being in contention or as a journey of self-discovery? Or, are you among the majority of golfers (over a third of my clients I've questioned) who play the game for the rush of hitting it pure?

Here are a few more questions worth considering.

Do you remember the last time you hit the perfect shot? Of course you do. I'm sure you know what course, hole and club you were playing at the time and have re-lived it countless times since in your imagination.

Most golfers remember their "eureka" moment and get hooked on the game as a result. For some this might be the memory of a one-off drive that entered the stratosphere 25 years ago, for others it's an experience that occurs maybe once or twice per round or maybe only half a dozen times per season but the elusiveness only serves to whet the appetite.

There are many reasons that golfers cite for their infatuation with the game; camaraderie, competition, exercise and the aesthetics of the golf course. However, research consistently reveals that the simple joy of hitting the ball well ranks highest. In an industry survey for example, 29% of respondents chose "ball striking" as their top reason for playing the game. The second most popular reason was "the people you play with" at 19%. No other response drew more than 9% of the vote, including posting a good score at 8%.

So, what if you could pin-point exactly what took place throughout your pre-shot routine, at address and during the shot itself to deliver precision contact with the ball for a cracking shot that took your breath away?

And what if I told you that since you've already had the experience of hitting the perfect shot once or half a dozen times in your golfing life, then you have it well within your capabilities to repeat the thrill of it next time you play?

Let's examine the experience more closely.

All the golfers I've questioned about their experience of hitting it pure describe similar feelings such as being relaxed, not trying too hard, not really thinking of anything in particular, increased confidence levels, having plenty of time and a sense of effortlessness.

Not a single golfer, when relaying their experience of the perfect shot, talks about swing mechanics or says they were focused on or thinking about technique – they only remember the feelings of effortlessness, confidence, and having a mind free of mental interference. Interesting isn't it, that golf's elite as well as the mid-handicap golfer who plays 18 holes every other Sunday morning reports exactly the same thing.

Bobby Jones once said that when he played good golf he thought very little but when he played exceptional golf he didn't think at all...and Tiger (back in the day) talked about his experience of "silence" before hitting the shot.

Now we're getting into the crux of the matter...could it be that the secret to the perfect shot actually lies in the moments **before** you take your swing? Yes, absolutely...and here's why.

In golf and other sports we are obsessed with action, movement, motion - the golf swing, the tennis serve, the penalty kick; but time and again research shows that the athlete with the quiet mind, the athlete who takes their time, relaxes and utilizes the gap that precedes motion, is the one who will perform a fluid, powerful and effortless shot.

So what needs to be paid attention to in the gap and how can you use it to produce a winning shot? Well, if we go back to what we know about how golfers feel when they hit it pure (relaxed, confident, mind free of interference) and we replicate these feelings during your pre-shot routine, set-up and swing – chances are you'll create the right conditions for the perfect shot to manifest. And if you can do it once, or half a dozen times in a round – potentially you can do it every shot.

Next issue we'll examine the gap that precedes each shot and show how you can use it to let go of the attachment to "getting it right", relax, take your time, quieten the mind, raise confidence levels and experience more of the joy this game of games has to offer.

Bringing Mind and Body Together for the Perfect Shot

Jayne Storey, Founder of Chi Performance GOLF continues her series on 'Recreating The Perfect Golf Shot' and outlines simple, timeless and proven principles to help you connect your mind with your body, and synch your mental game with your swing, to deliver precision contact with the ball, every time.

All motion originates in the mind with your swing being the result of the relationship between your mind and body **before** you take your shot. Golfers and other athletes rarely analyse the quality of their motion by the quality of their **non-motion** but this is exactly where you need to focus your attention if you want to be more consistent and produce more of those perfect shots.

Research shows a direct correlation between **peak performance and the ability to relax**.

Counter-intuitive as it may seem, the more you try to execute the perfect swing or putt, the less able your body is to produce a fluid motion. The science behind this is simple. When you over-think, the pre-frontal cortex captures and analyses the signal, interrupting the flow of time by holding up the signals to your motors-system thus making your efforts clumsy.

This is why golfers who may excel on the practice range and who understand the fundamentals of good swing technique often fail to perform their best around the course, particularly in competition.

I'm sure you've all had experiences of the perfect swing and have enjoyed both the feeling and result of the fluid, powerful and effortless shots you've made when your mind and body are in synch. These are times when you cease to dialogue with yourself about your performance and play golf "in the zone", swinging freely without getting in your own way.

Mind the Gap

If we deconstruct this experience we see that the state of relaxed readiness without over-trying or over-thinking allows you to commit to the shot with confidence and produces the feeling of effortless all golfers mention when describing their experience of hitting it pure. So, where's the blueprint for this "in the zone" experience? Well, think of the Eastern approach, (commonly known as Zen) in which practitioners exhibit a quality of mindfulness **before** the sword or bow and arrow is drawn, before the punch is thrown.

Now imagine a more Zen-like approach to your own golf, not as a philosophy but as a series of actions you perform **before you swing** to get centred, quieten your mind and relax your body – just as the karate or kung-fu expert pause to gather mind and body before action.

Playing in the Now



"One shot at a time, one hole at a time, one breath at a time".

This is a mantra I've developed and shared with my clients as I seek to emphasize the importance of being **"in the now"** - retaining the attitude of quiet concentration and a neutral emotional state.

This quality of mindfulness can and should be applied each time you prepare yourself to take a shot, as it is the relationship between your mind and body ***in the gap that precedes motion*** that determines the quality and outcome of your swing.

Psychologists have identified the "now" experience as being approximately 12 seconds long, that's 12 seconds in which you can focus completely on the present, giving your undivided attention to the task in hand. It's made for golfers really, isn't it? 10 seconds to bring mind and body together at address and 2 seconds to execute the perfect swing...let's do that together right now.

12 Seconds of Zen

At address, allow yourself 10 seconds to prepare for the shot and 2 seconds to swing using the following actions to achieve a state of relaxed yet alert readiness.

Relax your chest, lower your awareness to your navel area (centre of gravity) and sink your weight into your footprints. Each of these subtle, internal actions are performed sequentially with the aid of a few deep breaths. Remember those old Bruce Lee movies in which he would seem to compress himself into the ground before exploding with his famous one-inch punch? Well this is what you're aiming at, noticing that as you focus on your body and breathing your internal dialogue ceases and your mind becomes quiet as a result.

Now take your Zen approach into your swing with the following karate/kung-fu essential which helps deliver at least 15-20% more energy through the target. Simply inhale as you take the club away ***slowly***...then breathe out as you hit down from the top and through the ball.

Jayne Storey Interview by Steve Newell

On the basis that the mind and body must work in unison to achieve perfect motion, the physical and mental disciplines and principles of T'ai Chi can have significant crossover benefits to your golf game, as Jayne Storey explains to Steve Newell in the third part of her new series of articles.

Here are some essential principles of **Chi Performance GOLF** to help you remember how important the gap is between stillness and motion, i.e. your address position and beginning your swing.

Mindfulness of Breathing

Mindfulness of breathing is the simplest and most direct path to reaching and retaining the zone of relaxed concentration, and can also quickly help you re-establish a neutral state, for instance when you've hit a series of poor shots.

Mindfulness and "the zone" are synonymous; the first trains the mind to achieve stillness, the second is the experience of stillness while in motion.

A quiet mind allows the body to move with fluidity, power and effortlessness and also enhances the performance of accurate and precise motion. Over-thinking the technical aspects of motion, disrupts the signals sent to the brain's motor-system, and results in clumsy, ineffective movement, as your muscles will fire incorrectly, thus disrupting your swing sequence.

The ability to perform under pressure is best achieved by quietening the internal dialogue and controlling the body-chemistry, both of which can be achieved by focusing on your breathing, which in turn activates the 'Relaxation Response' and prevents 'paralysis by analysis'.

Moving from the Centre

The t'an tien or chi-core (navel area) is the body's centre of gravity; it acts as a fulcrum or pivot point around which motion is generated, thus the inside of the body moves the outside of the body.

Imagine the t'an tien like a golf ball, which sits inside your lower abdomen and initiates the rotation of your waist without compromising the stability of your hips, thus allowing you to create maximum torque for hitting longer drives.



Power Comes from the Ground

T'ai Chi teaches that power is generated from the ground upwards, with leverage being the result of ground-force energy transferred from the feet, through the spine, then the waist and into the hands/wrists. As the mind and body are so intimately connected, altering your breathing pattern not only has a profound effect on calming your thoughts, but can significantly alter your biomechanics and your ability to generate power in your swing.



Shallow breathing (into the upper chest) lifts the centre of gravity by making the body tight and unstable and negates the power that can be generated by relaxing and rooting into the legs.



Deep breathing empties the chest and allows you to 'find your feet', so that you can improve your lower-body stability and initiate your swing from the ground upwards, a key component of the Ben Hogan's classic golf swing.



The legs are the power-house of the golf swing, as the more energy you can transfer into the ground, the further you will drive the ball. You can develop this energy with the use of the Standing Meditation exercise shown in previous articles.

Images copyright Matt Harris; shot on location at The Oxfordshire

Neuromuscular Firing - How Your Brain Controls Your Swing

I meet with many experienced and committed golfers, the majority of whom tell me that they have two distinctly different swings; one that is fluid and is performed effortlessly when they're in the zone, and another that is clumsy and ineffective and occurs when they spend too much time thinking about technique.

Typically, 'over-thinking' manifests itself in a number of common faults that might start with inconsistencies in the pre-shot routine, and may also include shortening the backswing, lateral movement (rather than winding and unwinding), an inability to release the hands/club, and poor follow-through.

These ineffective movements are executed by golfers who know they can produce beautiful, fluid swings when their mind and body are in sync, but who still need to master the all-important factor that contributes to a natural and repeatable swing, especially when under pressure around the course.

At the end of this article we'll hear from some golfers, all of whom have mastered the all-important mental processes necessary to play consistently and win more games, but first, let's journey into your mind and learn how to use it to play better golf.

The more you think about technique, analyse or try to control your swing, the less able your body is to produce effortless motion. This 'effortlessness' is a major contributor to better golf, as the key element that stands out after playing a great shot, is the effortlessness of the shot.



The effortlessness of a great golf shot depends on you 'getting out of your own way'

So where does this 'effortless' come from? Typically it just happens – that is, it just happens when the fast-twitch muscles are engaged, those muscles being the ones that produce explosive action with little conscious effort.

There's a clue in that last sentence about how the fast-twitch muscles are activated!

The seamless flow of bones, muscles and tendons firing sequentially during the swing is dependent on one thing alone; allowing signals to flow freely to your motor system (the part of the brain responsible for movement), rather than getting diverted to the pre-frontal cortex (PFC) - the part of the brain that analyses information, i.e. thinking about technique.

The neuroscience of a fluid swing

The cerebellum is the part of the motor system in the brain that controls the fast-twitch muscles. When the PFC analyses signals (when you spend too long thinking about technique) they do not arrive at the cerebellum in time for the fast-twitch muscles to fire. As a result, the bulkier slow-twitch muscles take over but these can only assist in producing an effective motion (the swing you intended), when they work in conjunction with the fast-twitch muscles. When the slow-twitch muscles dominate, they slow down the motion, making it clumsy and ineffective (see list of common faults above).

How your brain affects your muscles

The ability that your muscles have to move in harmony and sequentially is thanks to the cerebellum informing which set of muscles to fire and when during the average 1.8 seconds of your swing. This occurs effortlessly (there's that word again!) when you get out of your own way, but the system all but breaks down when you try to control the motion with your conscious mind.

When the flow of signals moves quickly to the motor system and is transferred to the body, a deeper intelligence is switched on. When this happens you are able to produce your best swing consistently during a round and maintain good form, even when the pressure is on to produce a winning shot.

The feedback loop

This deeper intelligence is an aspect of the mind-body connection, experienced as "the zone" or *flow*-state of relaxed concentration, a realm in which everything just comes together and you produce a swing that takes your breath away.



The zone in golf has attained a myth-like status through films such as Bagger Vance and books like Michael Murphy's "Golf in the Kingdom", yet this seemingly otherworldly state is well within your capabilities and is more the stuff of neuroscience than mysticism. After all, the magic of today is the science of tomorrow.

The simplest way to create the all-important feedback loop between your mind and body, to ensure that signals go directly to the motor system and switch on the fast-twitch muscles for a fluid, powerful and effortless swing – focus on your breathing!

Some golfers shy away from the term 'Meditation' (an ancient practice that involves sitting, standing or walking for extended periods of time, focusing on the breath) and hence, don't take advantage of this essential skill.

Call it what you wish; Zen, Meditation, Mindfulness, attention-training, self-hypnosis, but focusing on your breathing keeps the mind quiet and when the mind is quiet your body can produce a swing worthy of your ability, rather than a swing which frustrates.

Trusting the process

In this last week alone I've received dozens of heart-warming messages from golfers around the world who have committed to the process of developing, activating and playing golf with a quiet mind – from an experienced professional commenting that when he gets his breathing right, his swing just flows, to a 20-handicap player who shot 80 on his home course (11 under his handicap), and an 8-handicap player who trusted the process so much he closed his eyes, took a deep breath and sank a 25 foot putt to win his first major tournament.

It could be your story tomorrow.

"Chi Performance GOLF has opened up a whole new dimension to the way I can improve my golf. My understanding of correct posture, balance, and power is now far more refined and advanced. The positive results have been felt internally with a mental calmness, and reflected externally with a run of 4 top five finishes in my last 5 tournaments".

Alex Saary, Head Coach, Golf Coaching Programme, British Olympic Association

Frontiers of the Golfing Mind

Performance Coach, “Zone” specialist and creator of the unique Chi Performance GOLF, *Jayne Storey*, presents a fresh approach to the hot topic of golf’s mental game. In a new series she uncovers the secrets of how the mind controls the body, from ancient principles, to advanced coaching techniques and the latest findings from neuroscience, examining just how powerful the mind-body connection is.

Every week the world’s top players tee off in championships with a chance of being crowned the winner. They spend hours on the driving range building a better swing, from dawn to dusk on the short game area honing a precision touch and feel, the majority go to the gym to improve their fitness, flexibility, golfing posture and for injury prevention.

All of these factors and more preparation contribute to the ultimate goal of achieving tournament victories, but it is perhaps the little spoken of area of their preparation – the mind – that we have the least knowledge of. Some top golfers have visible ‘mind coaches’ in attendance with them at tournaments, but most do their work behind closed doors with many simply relying on their own inner mental strength.

The one certainty is that it doesn’t matter how well prepared a golfer’s game is for the tournament, if they don’t have mental strength when it comes to the pressure of competition and distractions of the crowd they won’t be victorious.

The typical club player may not ever compete at such a high level of the game but nevertheless faces the same mental challenges every time they tee off. From the pressure of the first tee shot in front of golfing comrades, to that nerve-jangling clutch putt in a club match.

Have you ever wondered how the world’s top players cope with these situations in what seems to be such a laid back, yet focused manner? Researchers in the field of golf psychology have identified eight mental and physical conditions that are described as being characteristic of the feelings golfers have during those moments when they are hitting the ball extraordinarily well:

- 1. Mentally relaxed.** This is described most frequently as a sense of inner calm. Some golfers also report a sense of time being slowed down and having a high degree of concentration. By contrast, loss of concentration is associated with a sense of everything happening too fast and being out of control.
- 2. Physically relaxed.** A feeling of the muscles being loose and of movement being fluid yet accurate.

- 3. Confident/optimistic.** A positive attitude, feelings of self-confidence and optimism; maintaining poise and feelings of strength and control even during moments of intense pressure.
- 4. Focused on the present.** A sense of harmony as the body and mind work as one unit. No thoughts of the past or future. The body performs automatically, without conscious or deliberate mental effort.
- 5. Highly energised.** A high-energy state frequently described as feelings of joy, ecstasy, intensity and being “pumped”.
- 6. Extraordinary awareness.** Also a sensation of being completely in harmony with the environment.
- 7. In control.** The body and mind seem to perform automatically, and there is no sense of exerting or imposing control.
- 8. In the cocoon.** The experience of being completely focused yet detached from any external conditions and/or possible distractions. Also a sense of complete access to all of one’s powers and skills.

Throughout this new series, each of these mind-body conditions will be explored in turn, with suggestions about how you can access the state described and bring the benefits into your golf game.

For now though, enjoy your recollection of those times when you hit the perfect shot; when your swing was fluid, powerful and precise as you accessed the flow-state by neither trying too hard nor thinking too much.

As the old adage goes; “When you hit a bad shot, you think about what you’re going to do – When you hit a good shot, you think about what you’ve done”.

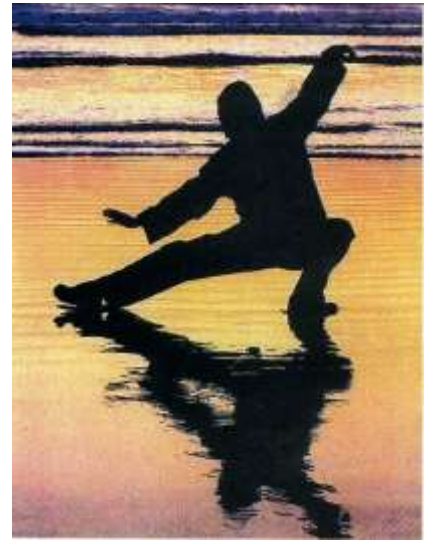


The quieter a golfer’s mind, the more able they are to hit the ball well.

Tiger Woods is reported as saying “silence” is what he hears in the moments before making some of his most spectacular shots and athletes from other sports, such as Michael Jordan (basketball) and Jonny Wilkinson (rugby) have described similar experiences.

Just how powerful is the mind-body connection?

Ancient training systems from the East, including T'ai Chi, place emphasis on slow motion practice, which has been proven by the latest research in performance coaching as one of the best ways to quieten the conscious mind and perfect the art of motion by opening the communication pathways between the mind and the body.



The most mysterious, least-known area of the universe does not lie in the farthest reaches of outer space. Nor is it found in the inky blackness of the world's oceans.

It is, of course, the human brain.

The 'brain as computer' model is now giving way to researchers in the field of quantum brain biology, who seek to explain transcendent states such as "the zone" and the spiritual dimensions of sporting excellence.

Self-Observation: Change Your Thinking and Change Your Game

"Golf is always a compromise between what your ego wants you to do, what experience tells you to do, and what your nerves let you do".

Bruce Crampton, Sport Australia Hall of Fame

In the last issue, we talked about the practice of self-awareness; now I want to introduce self-observation, which is crucial in helping you change your thinking to overcome challenges with your mental game. Where self-awareness is about having a clear perception of your personality, including strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivations, and emotions - self-observation is the act of observing what is going on in your body, your thoughts, and your feelings

Self-observation is a tool that I use with my clients from golf and other sports. It is one of the most important steps to overcoming any challenges, because once we begin to observe how we think, feel and act, we start the processes of reversing negative and restricting behaviours that can undermine our true ability, both on the golf course and in life itself.

What is self-observation?

"Observing yourself is the necessary starting point for any real change."

James Flaherty, author of '**Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others**' (Routledge) describes self-observation as this, "**To self-observe means to not become attached to or to identify with any content of our experience, but to watch alertly, openly, passively.**" You need to be able to watch or be aware alertly and openly of your thoughts, emotions and moods in order to see them for what they are. The Oxford Dictionary defines self-observation thus: *the objective observation of one's own attitudes, reactions or thought process.*

In the most basic sense, self-observation is the ability to view yourself as if you were observing yourself from behind a video camera. In some coaching circles they call it the big-eye; not the mind's eye, but the big-eye of you watching your moods, emotions, thoughts and body objectively.

How do you become an observer?

At first, being a self-observer and playing two roles (the observer and the observed) is very challenging. As with all exercises I introduce, it will become easier and more useful with practice. To help you get started, I am going to share with you:

- An exercise on how to observe yourself in the moment to catch immediate thoughts, feelings and emotions as you walk to the first tee.
- An exercise on how to observe yourself over a specified duration (a golf practice session) in order to look at ingrained patterns, habits and or behaviours.

Exercise # 1: Walking to the first tee

Objectives: To become more aware of my mood, feelings, thoughts and physical responses when walking to the first tee and teeing off and to begin to understand how I react to this stressful situation.

Instructions: Prior to the start of your game, practice slow, deep breathing to gain presence and awareness of your mind, body and emotions. Simply observe and notice what is going on without criticising or commenting to yourself. Immediately following your first tee shot, ask the following questions:

1. What was I feeling as I walked to the tee?
2. What were my exact thoughts, what was my inner dialogue?
3. How did I show up to this particular game? What is my mood?
4. What judgments and assessments do I have about my game at the moment?
5. What judgments and assessments do I have about the outcome of the shot?

The idea is to start becoming an observer of your traits in the moment so you can see how they impact your actions and results. Observe yourself without judgment, and then take a few moments to reflect on the conversation. Later you might wish to write down your observations in a training log.

Exercise # 2: Golf practice session

Objectives: To become more aware of what I am and am not accomplishing during my practice session, why I may not be accomplishing my intentions, and how I justify things to myself.

Instructions: Stop twice during your practice session (mid-way and at the end) and ask yourself the following questions.

It's helpful if you anticipate this exercise by observing yourself throughout each shot and remember that Jack Nicklaus, perhaps the best player of all time, never ever hit a shot – even in practice – without knowing exactly what the outcome was to be.

1. What specific, observable outcome did I produce each shot?
2. What excuses, stories or justifications do I have for not producing the outcomes I said I would produce?
3. What personal limitations (thoughts, feelings, inability to relax) got in the way of these outcomes?
4. How do I feel about what I observed?
5. Write out your observations in your training log.

Exercise # 3: Enhance your performance

The following is very succinct breakdown of how to create your own self-observation exercises, with the intent of bettering your performance on course, each time you play.

Identify a challenge or block you have in your game.

List questions on how you think, feel, and act in that situation.

Divide yourself in two; the observer and the one observed

Record what you observe and learn. Look for patterns and trends.

Golf is one of the simplest yet most complex sports; it would be much easier if our minds, emotions and bodies were under our control, and yet for many of us, our thoughts, feelings and physical habits are mostly unconscious. Bringing them into the light of day through the process of self-observation is crucial if you are serious about improving and unravelling the mysteries spoken of in 'The Golfer's Creed'.

"Golf is a science, the study of a lifetime in which you may exhaust yourself but never your subject. It is a contest or a duel, calling for courage, skill, strategy and self-control. It is a test of temper, a trial of honour, and a revealer of character".

David R. Forgan, 1899

Freedom

Making the jump from one skill level to another is all about playing with trust and freedom. It sounds simple enough but it takes a brave golfer to trust their own abilities, especially around the putting greens.

So how do you obtain freedom; freedom from convention, freedom from other people's insights, freedom from trends and fads, freedom from excessive thinking, and freedom from extreme emotions?

The answer lies in being yourself and trusting your swing so that you can play consistently and with joy. In essence, golf is a simple game about controlling the ball – and any improvement in skill level must start with believing in your own abilities.

Fred Shoemaker author of 'Extraordinary Golf' identifies what he calls 'the culture of golfers'; the mainstream approach of tips and techniques and formulas and continually looking to other people for advice on your swing. Freedom begins when you see golf as a journey, one of exploration and discovery such that you are curious and start to develop awareness of your own body and mental processes and are able to self-coach.

Every golfer has a natural ability waiting to be discovered and developed and anyone who had played the game for three or more years inevitably plateaus unless they consciously decide to shift their thinking to one of personal responsibility, an inside out approach where you know that you are the master of your own swing and your practice time becomes less about fixing what's wrong and more about discovering what leads to improvement.

Here are my 6 Keys to Freedom on the Golf Course:

1. RELAX

Tension in the mind causes tension in the body, and vice versa; but you can encourage yourself to relax by repeating a silent Mantra such as "Swing slow and easy", "Less is more", "Relax for easy power" and so forth.

This is a technique I use with the runners I coach; it helps to programme the mind with the intent you have for movement as there is a direct chemical correlation or effect that certain words have on your mind and body i.e. if you think about *performing under pressure*, you're most likely to feel pressurised!

2. SMILE

The “inner smile” is a very ancient Eastern method, often used to accompany Meditation. The simple act of feeling joyful and allowing a gentle smile to light up your face, actually sends endorphins (feel good chemicals) around your nervous-system and increases feelings of relaxation. The aim is to feel leisurely and calm such that your energy and your swing can flow with ease. Try it. You may be very surprised with the outcome when your intent is to actually enjoy your golf!

3. TRUST

This is especially crucial around the putting greens. The elite players often just glance at the hole and then commit to the stroke, whereas recreational players may take half a dozen or more times to look at the hole, size up the shot, decide how best to play and all of this only constitutes mental interference and increases doubt in one’s ability and anxiety about the intended shot.

I spend a lot of time coaching players to putt with their eyes closed as this increases feel and sensitivity and trust in one’s own abilities. A client even learned to trust his putting stroke so much that he closed his eyes to sink a 25 foot putt for the club championship. Awesome!

4. BUILD A SOLID PLACE TO SWING FROM

This is a quote from Michael Murphy’s mystical tale ‘**Golf in the Kingdom**’, where the enigmatic coach Shivas Irons instructs Murphy in building the foundation for a powerful and repeatable swing.

Constructing a solid place to swing from begins with powerful legs and a strong core, with a loose, relaxed upper body. This is the way of Tai Chi and all martial arts. It is the way of tennis and squash and running and performance arts and dancing; yet Greg Norman has commented that most golfers get this wrong and work on developing the complete opposite i.e. a strong upper body and relaxed legs.

Biomechanics teaches us that power is always the result of structure and relaxation; and to build a solid address position from which to really fire your swing starts with rooting and stability in the legs, the ability to drive through the core while allowing a relaxed upper body to finish this sequence as it lags behind and is only propelled into motion through the waist and legs respectively.

Squats and Kettle Bell Swings are the best training for building core and lower body strength; just ask one of the trainers at your local gym to show you how.

5. TAKE A LESSON IN GIRL POWER!

In Tai Chi and other soft-style martial arts, the emphasis is on relaxed power. Key sayings are "Softness overcomes strength" and "Stillness is the master of motion".

To understand what this means for golf, start watching the LPGA studying how women like Thai star Ariya Jutanugarn (pictured) swing the club. It's the free, uninhibited swinging (with a powerful release at the bottom) that helps them hit the golf ball such incredible distances.



Men try to hit the ball as hard as they can but as you well know, the more you try to put some "oomph" into your swing, the worse it gets and even robs you of distance. Counter-intuitive as it seems, the less you try the better the outcome!

6. REPLACE SWING THOUGHTS WITH SWING FEELINGS

The greatest enemy of freedom on the golf course is swing thoughts; they distract you from being present and if you are not present and 'in the moment' there will be an enormous barrier between your mind and your body which will be reflected in your swing and in the outcome of the shot.

Once you recognise that swing thoughts are often no more than mental interference you can get back to feeling and sensing what's working and what's hindering your performance and become a source of your own learning and development.

This type of freedom will serve to energize you and open up the way to limitless possibilities in your game.

The Inner Game of Putting

"So it happened...I played in a competition on Saturday and won it! This is the first major competition I have ever won! I shot 1 over par and won by 2 shots. I used your standing meditation technique on the last 5 holes when I knew I had a good score. I can't tell you how happy I am with the way I was able to control my emotions when the pressure was on, not least of all when I birdied the last hole by sinking a 25ft putt with my eyes closed!"

These are the words of my student, Jeremy, a 5 handicap player from Oxfordshire who committed to some 'deep practice' training with me, in order to really understand and experience the basic tenants of the inner game - Awareness, Choice and Trust.

In the words of Inner Game founder Timothy Gallwey;

"Experience with the three principles—awareness, choice, and trust—showed that they were inextricably connected. They were three parts of a whole.

Awareness was about knowing the present situation with clarity. *Choice* was about moving in a desired direction in the future. And *Trust* in one's own inner resources was the essential link that enabled that movement.

Each side of this triangle complemented and supported the other. The more I trusted, the easier it was to be aware. The more aware I was, the easier it was to see my choices. As my understanding of each principle deepened, I saw that they were all I needed to form the basis of a new approach to learning and making changes.

Change could be enjoyable. Change and improvement, without Self 1's interferences, could happen at an accelerated rate and be both reliable and continuous".

In my approach, which is based on 'deep practice' techniques from the East, Self 1 is referred to as 'monkey mind'; it's the mind which sabotages and undermines your efforts and destroys your confidence. Gallwey's Self 2 occurs when mental interference is absent and I refer to this experience as being in the zone or flow.

So what was different about Jeremy's game that day; how and why did he bypass Self 1 /monkey mind to get and stay in the zone and trust himself so much that he could make the final, winning putt with his eyes closed?

Awareness, Choice and Trust

These principles form a 'non-directive' method of coaching, which affirms that you are the expert on your own short game and helps you to uncover this inner authority or knowing, by developing the principles; it's a positive upwards spiral that results in enhanced performance and more enjoyment.

Let's look at each briefly.

Awareness or more specifically, self-awareness is the stuff champions are made from; it's the ability to really know your game and to self-coach. To help with this, I propose a method called Self-Observation, which is simply noticing what's happening as you prepare to putt:

What happens when you approach the green?

What happens to your grip?

What happens to your breathing?

What happens to your facial expression?

What happens to your internal dialogue?

What happens to your emotions?

The simple act of noticing or observing yourself, without criticism or judgement, is enough to halt these often disruptive processes in their tracks and help restore a neutral state.

The principle of Choice I feel has to do with attention, something we take for granted and generally have little or no control over. However, when you become self-aware, you will notice your attention and how it wanders or grasps or becomes involved in negative associations. Yet if you choose to place your attention on your body or your breathing or on staying relaxed and present, or you choose to take your time and not be rushed, or you choose to adopt the 'occurring world' approach from the last issue, your experience on the putting green will be all the better for it as you will choose to remember that each time you address the ball, you have the opportunity to play your best shot.

My work over the years with amateurs and professionals alike, shows that fear or anxiety is the number one association they have with putting and yet the more a golfer tries to make the putt, the worse the outcome; it's a frustrating and often devastating feedback loop that can only be addressed by learning to Trust.

Doubt creates anxiety, which causes changes in your bio-chemistry, increasing feelings of pressure, discomfort and nervousness; it also gets your PFC (pre-frontal cortex) involved, which starts analysing your performance, second-guessing, and interrupts the signals to your motor-system, rendering your shot clumsy.

Practising putting with your eyes closed is the only way to bypass this, as you will learn to putt with feeling and instinct, rather than the dictates of the monkey mind (Self 1).

Jayne Storey

Jayne Storey is a Movement and Performance Coach.

She helps golfers strengthen their mind~body connection so they can deliver fluid, powerful, effortless and precise golf shots in high-pressure situations like competition or tournaments.

Read more about [Jayne](#)

Ring: +44 (0) 7986 447 250

Email: jayne@chi-performance.com

Follow: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

www.Chi-Performance.com



Jayne is on The Development Team for [PIN](#), the golf app by former World No. 1 and Masters Champion **Adam Scott**



She writes a regular column for [Atlantic Golf & Lifestyle](#) magazine



Her methodology **Chi-Motion GOLF** is one of a number of innovative approaches that currently forms part of the **PGA's Professional Development Programme**. If you are a PGA member and would like more details, please email nikki.roden@pga.org.uk



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