A male golfer in a red and white striped polo shirt, khaki pants, and a dark blue cap is captured in the middle of a golf swing. He is holding a driver. The background is a blue sky with faint architectural blueprints overlaid, featuring various lines, dimensions, and text like 'EXIST. BUILDING', 'OVERHANG', 'BELOW', 'NEW 36x36', 'SKYLIGHT', 'ELEVATION', '2'-4 1/2"', and 'NEW SHE'. Four horizontal rulers are placed across the top right of the page, each showing a scale from 1 to 10 inches.

HOW TO LENGTHEN & WIDEN YOUR SWING

By Brett Taylor with Al Barkow

Photos by BW Studios, Courtesy of Eli Ingram, Lit'l Links Golf Club

No one questions that the wider your swing radius and the longer the length of your swing, the farther you will hit the ball.

However, contrary to popular belief, it is not absolutely necessary to be a super-flexible, flat-bellied teenager to expand your swing width and length. You just have to do each the right way. For example, many golfers think that width in the golf swing is achieved by extending the club as far back and away from them as possible. But in doing so, they create too much separation between the arms and body, which creates a lot of forward swing problems. So, let's find out how you can widen and lengthen your swing properly to get the best results.



Swing width is defined as the radius of the clubhead from your sternum, or how far the clubhead is from the center of your chest throughout the swing.



It must be noted that width and length are mutually exclusive elements in the golf swing. You can have a wide swing that is short in length or a long swing that does not have much width. However, there are some aspects of each that relate, such as the way the left arm is extended, and you can develop good width and length at the same time. When you do, you will be a far more complete golfer than if you only have one of them.

The Width Of The Swing

Swing width is defined as the radius of the clubhead from your sternum, or how far the clubhead is from the center of your chest throughout your swing. The wider the swing, the greater the distance the club moves, which translates into more clubhead speed. Clubhead speed, of course, determines the degree of power you impart to the ball.

The length of your arms is a definite factor in how wide your swing can be, as is your innate flexibility. If you have longer arms than the other guy, you are able to naturally have a wider swing. The same is true with how much body rotation you are capable of attaining. So, the idea is to maximize your particular potential.

As noted previously, you don't try to gain swing width by stretching your arms out as far as possible in the backswing. To do so is to separate your arms from your body so they are unable to work together as a coordinated unit. Also, the tendency is to over-shift to the right, slide your right side too much laterally and sway. Tempo and rhythm are seriously challenged in all of the above. It takes more compensatory movements to bring everything together at impact, and that is rarely achieved.

Attaining Swing Width

You can achieve your maximum effective swing width in a few ways.

Left-Arm Extension — The left arm should straighten out almost completely in the backswing. The arm doesn't get stiff, and the elbow doesn't lock. There is just the slightest bit of give in the elbow, but overall the arm is straight.

Wrist Hinge — The longer you prolong the hinging of your wrists in the backswing, the farther the clubhead gets from your body and hence a wider swing. You should not begin to hinge your wrists, which

The early wrist hinge creates a narrow overall swing plane compared to that of the late wrist hinge.

is an upcocking with the thumbs coming toward you, until your hands are at least waist high and perhaps a little past that. If you hinge your wrists early in the takeaway (bending your left arm), you will not have a very wide golf swing.

Lateral Head Movement — It may sound heretical to say you should move your head in the swing, but in fact everyone's head moves to some extent during the swing. Let that happen to assist widening your swing, but be sure the movement is lateral. You don't want your head to move up and down for a lot of reasons, one of which is that it does nothing to help widen your swing arc.

Weight Transfer — To achieve maximum width on your backswing, it is important to transfer weight to your right side. However, you don't want to exaggerate this. Don't shift all your weight to the right, but instead transfer it to the inside of your right foot, not the outer edge.

Shoulder Rotation — A more level rotation of your shoulders will widen your backswing arc. Understand that the shoulders are not precisely level in the turn simply because the right shoulder is lower at address due to the right hand being lower on the handle. However, the feel is that the shoulders remain level.

This is accomplished when you do not tilt them by dropping the left shoulder down when drawing the club back from the ball, or raising the right shoulder as though you were trying to lift up the club. If you swing the club back with the left arm fully extended (but not rigid) and hinge your wrists late in the backswing, your shoulders will almost surely rotate on the level you want.

The overall effect of making a wider swing is a flatter plane than you may be swinging on now. By flatter, we mean the shaft of the club at the completion of your backswing is even with your shoulder line, perhaps even a bit below it. It's a good position — one by which power is not lost and flight control is enhanced.

Don't Forget The Forward Swing

The width of your swing is not only a backswing concept. There is a forward swing component that is related to the backswing. It has to do with how you use your elbows. The distance between your



The Wider Swing Drill




A good way to develop a wider swing is to flatten the swing plane by lining up 20 to 30 yards left of the actual target and swinging the club on a path out to the target itself. This helps you understand how to control the path of the club and get a feel for it so that it can be transferred to your on-course game when you square up in your regular stance.




A full-page photograph of a male golfer in mid-swing. He is wearing a red and white striped polo shirt, khaki pants, a dark blue Titleist cap, and white golf gloves. He is holding a golf club, and a large, semi-transparent arc is drawn over the background, indicating the path of the clubhead. The text '270 Degrees' is overlaid on the arc.

270 Degrees

A vertical diagram showing a golf club shaft at various angles, illustrating the concept of degrees in a swing.

A full swing, with the shaft of the club reaching a point where it is parallel with the ground, goes approximately 270 degrees.

A vertical diagram showing a golf club shaft at various angles, illustrating the concept of degrees in a swing.

elbows at address should be maintained throughout the entire swing. If on the backswing your right elbow flies outward or behind you — chicken wings, as we say — that creates a separation that alters the path of the club. If the left elbow chicken wings at impact or just beyond, you have given up most of the power the swing should generate and flight control as well.

Getting Length In Your Swing

The longer the swing, the more degrees in which the clubhead travels. A full swing, with the shaft of the club reaching a point where it is parallel with the ground, goes roughly through 270 degrees. To put a more common picture on this, imagine a golfer at address with the club behind the ball and at 6 o'clock. If he swings the club to parallel, it is at 3 o'clock and has moved 270 degrees. If the club swings to 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock, it is short of parallel. If it has moved beyond parallel and has tipped to where it is pointing at or almost at the ground, it is past parallel. That is where John Daly swings it, which is about 300 degrees.

Golfers should not strive to get the club to a parallel position at the completion of their backswing unless they have the strength, flexibility and technique to control the club so solid contact is made with the ball and accurate shots are played. If that is the case, more clubhead speed is generated and you will hit the ball farther and straighter than if you don't get to parallel.

You can get the club to parallel in ways that are not going to bring you added distance and will diminish flight control. One is by bending your left arm to complete your backswing. That may get the club to parallel, or past it, but not in an effective way. Keep in mind that the club does not have to get to parallel to achieve maximum length.

Attaining A Longer Swing

There are some keys to gaining a longer swing that is under control.

Shoulder/Hip Rotation — This must always be in synch with the swinging of your arms. Essentially, the arms stay in front of your body throughout the swing. It is important that your elbows retain their distance apart

and are always pointing down.

If you have good flexibility, you can create maximum effective swing length with a significant full rotation of the shoulders. Ideally, the left shoulder moving to the place where the right shoulder was at address will constitute a full rotation of the shoulders.

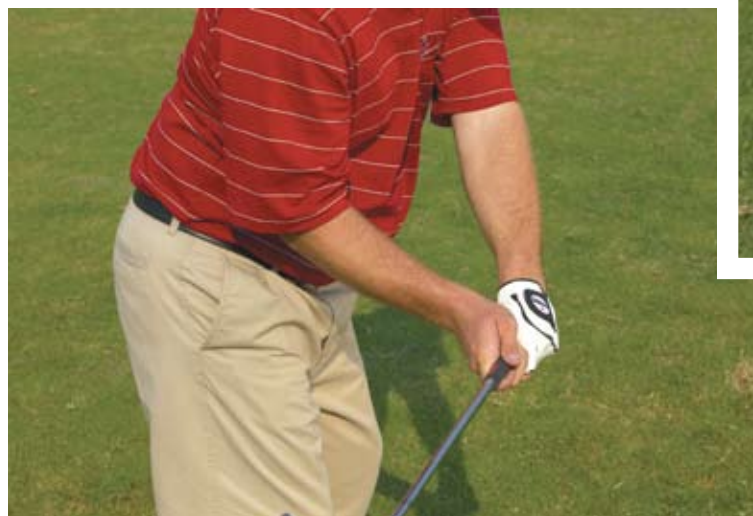
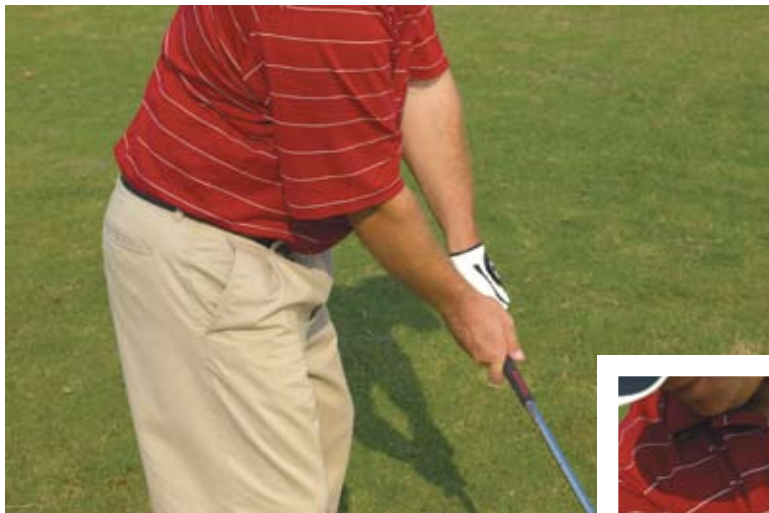
Older golfers who have lost flexibility

can achieve the same results with more turn or rotation of the hips. The hips are not as dependent on your flexibility.

John Daly gets his enormous swing length because he has remarkable flexibility and shoulder rotation. His arms never get away from his body. That is the ideal.

Wrist Hinge — You can complete the backswing and get maximum length by hinging your wrists completely. You must be careful, however, that you do not hinge beyond your normal range of motion. If you do, chances are very good that the club will come loose from your left hand. This will require a kind of regripping and can almost invariably cause mishits and misdirected shots and/or an open clubface at impact. **GI**

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The distance between the elbows should remain essentially the same throughout the swing, even as the right elbow folds into the right side in the backswing and then unfolds at and past impact.