

Chapter 1: The Forty Yards You Did Not Lose to Age

You know the number. Not the handicap, the number. The tree on the right at your home course that you used to carry, or reach, or at least bother. Now you play short of it and pretend you meant to.

That gap between where the ball used to finish and where it finishes today is real. I am not going to tell you it is imaginary. What I am going to tell you is that most of it was never taken from you by your birthday.

What actually disappeared between sixty and today

Clubhead speed does decline with age, and the rate of loss speeds up after about sixty. Many golfers give back somewhere on the order of five to ten miles an hour of driver speed by their sixties³¹.

Hold that in your hand for a second. Five to ten miles an hour. On a driver, that is worth roughly fifteen to twenty-five yards of carry, depending on how well you strike it. It is not nothing. It is also not forty.

So where did the other twenty go?

Golfers aged 70 and over average about **190 yards** off the tee, the shortest of any age band. But golfers with handicaps of 30 or higher, at any age, average roughly **184–185 yards**³.

Read that comparison again slowly, because it is the foundation of this entire book. The seventy-year-old and the high-handicapper of any age land in almost the same place. Age and poor technique produce the same yardage. Which means the yardage by itself cannot tell you which one you have.

Average drive by group (Arccos, 2025)



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In the same Arccos dataset, drawn from more than four million rounds, the average male amateur drives it 224.7 yards, and players under a 5 handicap average about 250³. Those low-handicap averages include plenty of men in their sixties and seventies. They did not find a loophole in biology.

Why 'you've lost your flexibility' is the most expensive sentence in senior golf

There is a thread on the GolfWRX instruction forum with a title that reads like a cry for help: *Older golfers: losing DISTANCE. What Do You Do??????* Dozens of men have posted in it over the years. The replies split into two camps. One camp moves up a tee box and makes peace. The other camp rebuilds the swing around rotation and sequencing rather than effort, and reports getting yards back.

Both camps are full of men the same age. The difference between them is not flexibility. It is what they decided the problem was.

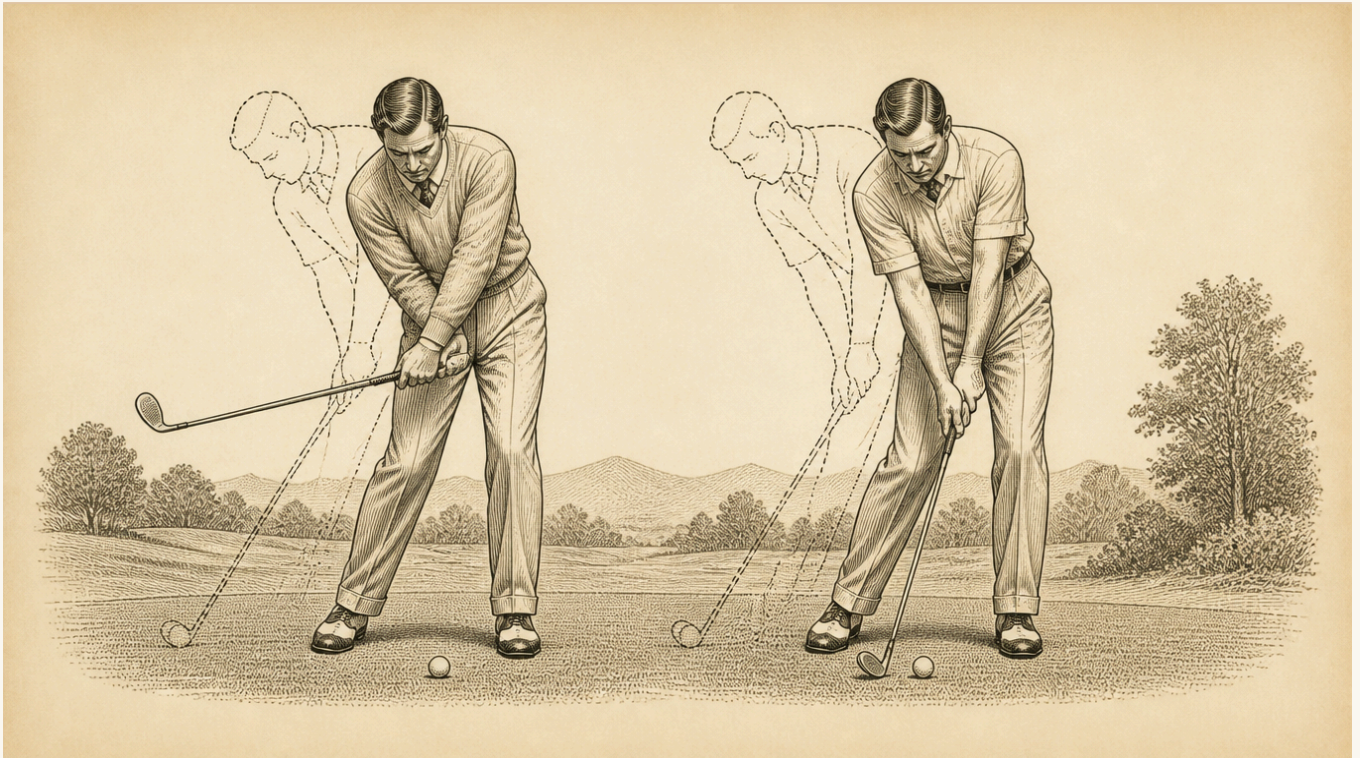
Here is why the flexibility diagnosis costs you so much. It is unfalsifiable and it is final. If you accept that your turn is the reason, there is nothing to fix, only something to mourn. So you stop looking. And while you are not looking, the actual thief goes on working.

The Misdiagnosis Tax: every yard you blame on age is a yard you stop trying to recover. The sentence "I've lost my flexibility" is not usually wrong about your body. It is wrong about your ball.

Consider what the screening data actually shows. In TPI's database of more than 90,000 golfers worldwide, 67% display **early extension** — a forward thrust of the lower body toward the ball during the downswing, which stands the torso up through impact³¹. It is the single most common fault in the game, ahead of coming over the top.

Now the number that should make you sit forward. Of more than 100 tour professionals screened by the same body, 99% showed no early extension at all³¹.

Two out of three amateurs do it. One in a hundred professionals does. A fault that lopsided is not a consequence of ageing joints. It is a learned habit, and it is bleeding distance out of your swing on every full shot you hit.



The one thing that still works exactly as well at seventy as it did at forty

Your shoulders may have tightened. Your hips almost certainly have. But there is one source of power in the golf swing that does not care how old you are, and it has been sitting under your feet the whole time.

The ground.

A 2025 systematic review in *Sports Medicine*, covering nine empirical investigations, found moderate-to-strong relationships between ground reaction force measures and clubhead speed, with more skilled golfers producing higher vertical forces²⁷. The same review reported that skilled golfers show greater "unweighting" of the lead leg than less skilled players, which lets them generate superior vertical force in the downswing (PMC / Sports Medicine, 2025-12).

Push down, and the ground pushes back with exactly as much force, whether you are forty or seventy-eight. It does not soften with age. Your muscles have to press into it, yes, but pressing down through your feet asks far less of your joints than reaching for the top of a backswing you no longer own.

This is not a gym exercise. It is a timing skill. Timing is the one athletic quality you can still improve at any age, and it is the one nobody has been checking.

Case: A published intervention study of a simplified swing model built for senior golfers found measurable improvements in ball striking, and in the players' motivation to keep playing¹⁵. The swing change worked after fifty. That has been tested, not assumed.

My own moment came on a cold Tuesday in November, standing in my kitchen in socks while the kettle boiled. I was rehearsing a move I had read about in a coaching manual from the 1950s, purely out of curiosity. I felt my trail heel come off the floor on its own, late, because the swing pulled it up. I had spent thirty years lifting it deliberately and early. That is the whole of it, and it took me another two winters to understand why it worked.

What this book asks of you: five minutes, socks, a kitchen floor

No gym. No stretching program. No swinging harder. I mean those three promises literally, and I will hold to them for twenty-eight chapters.

What I do ask for is five minutes a day on a smooth floor, in socks, with no club in your hands. Socks on a hard floor let you feel pressure moving under your feet in a way that spiked shoes on a range mat never will. That is the entire equipment list.

One caution, said plainly, because I would rather you finish the book than finish a course of physiotherapy. Socks on tile or hardwood are slippery by design, and that is what makes them useful. Do the drills within arm's reach of a kitchen counter or the back of a heavy chair. Never swing an actual club indoors. If a movement produces sharp pain rather than mild effort, stop that day and come back tomorrow.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Write down your honest current driver carry and the number you used to hit. That gap is your working figure for the rest of this book.
- ▶ Attribute five to ten miles an hour of driver speed loss to age, and no more. Everything beyond that is a technique question with a technique answer.
- ▶ Treat any advice that begins "at your age" as a diagnosis to be tested, not a verdict to be accepted.
- ▶ Accept that the ground under your feet delivers exactly the same force at seventy as it did at forty. Your job is timing, not strength.
- ▶ Clear a five-foot square of smooth floor and put a pair of socks by the coffee machine tonight. That is the whole setup.

Before you change anything, you deserve proof that I am right about your own swing rather than about golfers in general. There is a test for that, and it takes ten balls and about four minutes on a range. It also tends to produce a result that irritates people, because half those balls are struck with a deliberately shortened backswing, and they very often fly the same distance. What happens if yours fly farther?