

## FOUNDATIONS OF FLIGHT | HEAD POSITION

Brought to you by Niklas Daniel and Brianne Thompson of AXIS Flight School at Skydive Arizona in Eloy. Photos by David Cherry. Information about AXIS' coaching and instructional services is available at [axisflightschool.com](http://axisflightschool.com).



The skull houses several environment-sensing organs, such as the eyes, the ears and the cerebellum. Working in concert, these help define and regulate your body's balance and motion (i.e., location, speed, direction and orientation in space). To fly your body as effectively as possible, you need to receive quick and clear feedback from these systems. Therefore, it is important to properly position your head relative to the rest of your body.

### Performance Objectives

- Proper body alignment, which increases flight stability and efficiency of movement
- Improved body and spatial awareness
- Less stress on the body to avoid injury and reduce calories burned

The human head is heavy and the muscles in your neck keep it in place. The position and tilt of the head are crucial for economy of motion, because if the head deviates from a proper position, it requires additional muscular work to maintain control. Improper head and body alignment can cause involuntary movement and instability. A poor head position also causes a deteriorating chain of movements through the entire body, since your head tilt affects your upper back and consequently influences posture.

Skydiving and tunnel flying already expose your body to abnormal stresses. Therefore, exercise and stretching are essential to avoid injury. But don't underestimate technique. Consciously altering your technique can lead to greater flying comfort and economy of motion.

Check in with how your body feels during and after a flight. First check in with your breathing. Are you out of breath? If you find that your breathing is rapid and shallow—or worse, you are holding your breath—you are not receiving the proper amount of oxygen. Second, check whether you're sore. Improper breathing leads to tension in the body, which usually manifests itself in the neck and shoulders. Unnecessary energy expenditure will tire you out and hinder fluid arm mechanics.

Check out your form on video (or in a mirror at the tunnel). Do you appear to have no neck? Breathe slowly and deeply while relaxing your jaw and extending your neck. Move your shoulders away from your ears. Proper body alignment and breathing will help you burn fewer calories and build endurance.

The blue tape across the visor in these photos illustrates proper head positioning in various orientations:



Back Fly



Belly (Front View)



Head Up

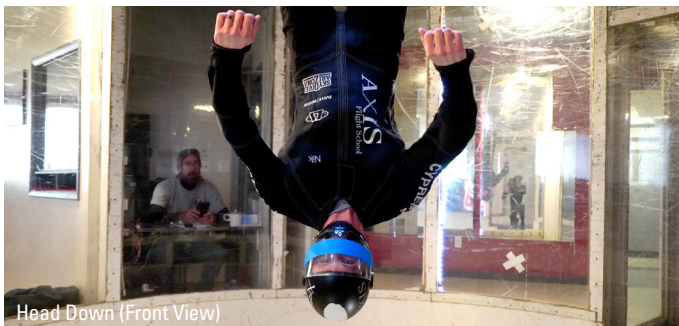


Belly (Side View)

### Helpful Hints

Each jumper's body shape and flying style are unique, like a fingerprint. It takes effort to make proper head alignment habitual. If you wear a full-face helmet, you can think of looking through only the top of the face shield. It helps to use a thin piece of gaffer's tape to divide the visor in top and bottom halves. Rotate your head so that you see your target above the tape. If you use an open-face helmet, focus on looking through your eyebrows as opposed to your cheekbones.

*The authors intend this article to be an educational guideline. It is not a substitute for professional instruction.*



Head Down (Front View)



Head Down (Side View)