

Overcoming the Kick: *Taking the Fear out of Recoil*



Let's face it: you don't want to feel like a mule has kicked you every time you pull the trigger of a gun. Countless videos on YouTube show the young and young-at-heart firing guns that pack more punch than they are designed to have, and many of these people do not have the knowledge to handle the weapons properly.

Recoil is merely the reaction of the gun to an expression of energy created in the barrel and expelled from the muzzle. When the trigger is pulled, the hammer housed within the receiver of the gun depresses the firing pin with ample force to pop the primer on the end of the round. The primer creates a small flash of fire, igniting the gunpowder in the shell. Thanks to the restriction of a limited atmosphere in the barrel, this sudden energy then builds up pressure. This pressure seeks out the path of least resistance, pushing the projectile (bullet or shot, depending on the type of gun used) through the barrel of the gun and out the forward end (muzzle). This sudden release of pressure causes the entire length of the gun to move backward and into the shoulder of the person firing the gun. The amount of powder and constriction of the barrel determine how much kick or recoil is experienced.

It is a misconception that the amount of report (noise) the gun makes determines how much recoil it actually has. The sound of a gun has more to do with barrel length than charge. Also, the closer the end of the barrel is to your ears, the louder the gun seems. From a safety standpoint, you should always wear eye and ear protection on the range. Over time, your hearing can be permanently damaged if not properly shielded from the report of gunfire.

So how do you take the kick out of recoil? Let's look at some simple steps that may help you make your time on the range more enjoyable and allow you to come home with fewer bruised shoulders. Remember, as in any other shooting event, repetition results in accurate and precise shots.



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First, shooting a gun that does not fit you is a step in the wrong direction. Although it may seem that smaller-gauge guns will have lighter recoil, this is not true; guns that weigh less will have even more felt recoil.

You need to be able to properly shoulder the gun comfortably in the crease of your shoulder, located below the clavicle (collarbone) and directly

opposite the shoulder blade. This area is located between two major muscles known as the pectoralis major and the deltoid muscle. Improperly shouldering the gun outside of these areas accentuates the amount of recoil you feel. Think of your body as the shock absorber on a car and the gun being fired as a bump in the road.

You should practice shouldering the gun repeatedly without firing until it becomes second nature, allowing you to concentrate on the execution of the shot. Hands and eyes work together for target acquisition and completion of the shot. Always remember: bad practice is worse than no practice at all.

Anticipating the recoil is something that can mentally break down your shooting form. How can you keep recoil from breaking your focus? Simply accept recoil as part of the process. Focus on all aspects of the shot, not just on completion.

Keep your mind alert and aware of what needs to be done, and your body positioned to execute the shot properly. Mount the gun in proper position, and make the shot with proper follow-through. With practice, this will result in a broken clay or a hole in the 10 ring of the target. Now take the same sequence of events and interject the word *recoil* into each step. It becomes an overwhelming force in your mind, and it will affect your overall performance. Golfers sometimes refer to this as the "yips." Shooters call it flinching.

Flinching is anticipating the shot before it occurs, and it pushes all the orderly steps you should follow into complete chaos. A shooter who flinches is not going to be

accurate in the long run, as only the occasional shot will find its mark. The mind can be a place of intimate silence between the gun and the person, or it can be a place of internal chaos where you defeat yourself before sending even the first shot downrange.

So how can you control flinching? Accept that there is a problem, and set your mind to fix it! Don't put too much pressure on yourself too soon, as you will be discouraged at the first failure. Not flinching is a mental game; if you think too much about the previous shot, your focus begins to break down. Each subsequent thump of the gun can be a reminder of the last shot, and this can turn into a cycle of mentally berating yourself while facing kickback from the gun.

You can learn to focus on shot execution by concentrating on the shot itself. First, make sure that your firearm is unloaded. Second, go through your pre-shot routines, target acquisition, and so forth. Last, dry-fire the gun (or say "bang") when you feel like you are on target.

Shotgun instructors sometimes teach students the "dummy round technique"—the instructor hands the student the gun, but the student doesn't know whether or not the gun actually has a live round in it. The lesson is to get the target in sight, determine where the shot should be made, and follow through appropriately regardless of whether or not your gun is loaded. You need to practice these steps regularly to perfect your form and shot placement. Over time, recoil will become just one part of the process. You will notice it less, and it will have less impact on your performance.

Remember, you should leave the range having had a positive experience, not looking for a bag of ice for your shoulder. Prepare, work on the basics, and think more about the action than the reaction. You *can* overcome the kick.

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