

FOUNDATIONS OF FLIGHT | THE NEUTRAL BELLY POSITION



AXIS
Flight School



Brought to you by AXIS Flight School Instructor Bri-
anne Thompson at Skydive Arizona in Eloy. Photos
by Niklas Daniel.

Although all jumpers may feel familiar with the neutral belly position because they learned it during their student programs, many do not use proper technique since some of the methods used to teach it actually encourage improper positions. In addition, many jumpers treat it as only a deployment position and don't give it the attention it deserves as an essential flying position.

Purpose

- ▶ Perfect the fundamental body position that is applicable to every freefall discipline in the sport
- ▶ Troubleshoot incorrect technique

Execution

Hips

The key element of the neutral belly position is the placement of the hips, which should be at the lowest point of the body in relation to the relative wind. To achieve this, you must squeeze your seat by engaging your gluteal muscles while keeping your spine straight.

Common problems: Wide knees, knees lower than the hips (i.e., "butt up"), arching from the chest, looking down. Squeezing your seat will immediately remedy all of these problems. You will also be able to adjust your fall rate dramatically if you begin in the proper position.

Knees

Keep your knees a little wider than shoulder-width apart. Engage your shinbones by applying positive pressure into the wind (assuming you don't wear booties) and point your toes, which will tend to cause your legs to extend properly. (Polite reminder: Keep your hips lower than your knees.)

Common problems: Flexing the feet, which can cause the legs to bend and become floppy.

Arms

Your arms should be somewhat forward with your elbows in front of the line of your shoulders. As you increase your arch and lift your chest, your elbows should be level with your shoulders or even slightly lower. Think of getting lift on your biceps, which will allow your chest to become more erect. When belly flying, your forearms should be relaxed and mobile in order to take grips in different positions.

Common problems: Holding the elbows above the shoulders. If your elbows are above and behind your shoulders, your arms will scrunch your shoulder blades toward the center. It is important to keep

your shoulder blades apart since the closer they are, the more you'll have a tendency to arch through your chest.

Helpful Hints

Although some coaches stress learning the mantis position (a way of flying in which the arms resemble those of a praying mantis), prioritizing your arm movements to look like a competitive formation skydiver before you shift your center of mass will hinder your progress. If you first learn to properly fly your lower body, you will find a more efficient way of flying that is completely effortless. The command that FS flyers have over their lower bodies (i.e., their hips and legs) causes the flying position of their arms, which are at rest. Forcing this position is ineffective.

Jumpers have many different body types, sizes and shapes. However, the guidelines for a strong neutral body position apply to all: low hips, straight spine, elbows in front and slightly lower than the shoulders and positive pressure on the shins with toes pointed.



To view the instructional video, use the QR code to the left or visit the Foundations of Flight page at parachutistonline.com.