

# HEAD DOWN BODY POSITION



FLYING HEAD-FIRST IS USUALLY THE LAST ORIENTATION YOU'LL LEARN. HERE WE LOOK AT THE THREE MAIN HEAD DOWN BODY POSITIONS  
WORDS ALLY MILNE

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## HEAD POSITION

Head down in any of the main positions suffers from several common points of difficulty caused by pre-programmed muscle memory and body posture. The essence of a stable head down position is that it is entirely vertical, or 'falling down the tube'. Our body posture, however, works against us in this respect. Look at anyone standing straight in front of you, or yourself in a mirror sideways on. You will notice that the head and neck are not in a direct line from the spinal column but are curving forwards. In head down, this causes us to catch air and drives us rapidly forwards. Our head must be in direct line with the spine without lifting the chin. If you think about putting your neck into the back of your collar while forming a 'double chin', you are in about the right position.

## TORSO POSITION

The spine must remain straight, similar to all body positions. One point of difficulty is chest arching or puffing the chest out. The torso can be thought of as the mainsail of a large yacht. If the chest is puffed out it can cause unwanted drive forwards, so we must think of rolling the shoulders in slightly to prevent this and keep the torso flat. The position of the arms can affect the chest position greatly.

## ARM POSITION

The arms in normal flight must be placed in front of the flyer with the air hitting the back part of the hands and the arms straight. A common mistake here is having the air hit the palms of the hands, which can cause the elbows to bend and reduces the control area. When this is combined with arms out to the side, this commonly causes 'pizza hands'. The arms should be approximately 45 degrees relative to the horizon, and you should think about pressing the elbows forward rather than the hands and relaxing the forearms. You should use just enough strength to hold the arms in place – any more will cause the arms to be too stiff, making it more difficult to fly.

## LEG POSITION

There are a variety of styles that the legs can be flown in and each one has their own advantages and disadvantages. There is often some debate about which leg position is the 'best', but the ability to fly with the legs in all positions is an important skill – especially in group head down flying, where your legs may get burbled by other flyers.

## LEG POSITION – STRADDLE

This is where the legs are held straight with the heels pressed into your shoes →

**H**ead down flight captures the imagination and is held to be the pinnacle of freeflying ability. It is often the aim of freeflyers to be able to fly in this position, and groups of freeflyers can be gauged by those who can and those who cannot. In this article, we will look at the important basics of head down flight and the three main body positions which are most common today.

As with any new skill or body position, it is recommended that you speak to a BPA FF coach before trying this skill either on a coach jump or a solo. Due to the extreme nature of vertical and horizontal movement in head down, you must understand how to avoid flying up or down the line of flight. This is perhaps more important in head down than any other position.

There are two main coaching philosophies in learning head down and each has their own merits. You can learn to fly head down from either a static position (normally held by a coach) or by dynamically flying into the position through steep tracking and altering the pitch angle. A coach in either one of these philosophies will explain that theirs is the better but, in reality, both work towards the same goal and using techniques from both methods generally works best for the most complete skill set. Head down skydives are short and progress can seem difficult. For maximum progress up the learning curve, get some coach jumps and tunnel time to help you. Little problems can turn quickly into big problems at 170+ mph.

About 80 per cent of the work in learning head down is striving to find and maintain this vertical position. Once the vertical core position is learned, the other manoeuvres that form part of the BPA FF2 grading are much simpler to learn.

We talked in the last article on Sitfly about the importance of having a good solid foundation position, and we will in turn look at each of the areas of the body and talk about how we can successfully use them to fly head down efficiently.

**1** *Ally Milne in a head down 'Straddle' body position, by Chris Cook*

**2** *Ally in 'Daffy', by Chris Cook*

**3** *Shelf practice on the mockup, by Chris Cook*

**“**The essence of a stable head down position is that it is entirely vertical, or 'falling down the tube' **”**



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and legs are pushed out to the side to create a stable platform of balance.

This is generally held to be the first head down position. Great, because it keeps the legs in a symmetrical configuration and lends itself to both flying at faster speeds vertically and big horizontal moves. It is more difficult to fly slower or pick up grips in this position. When learning head down in the sky, this is the position normally taught first.

### LEG POSITION – DAFFY

This is an asymmetrical position with one leg forward and one leg back with a bend at the knees. Both legs must deflect the same amount of air, otherwise the flyer will drift forwards or backwards or spin. Unwanted turns can often be caused by the back leg not being placed straight back but by curving behind the body. A degree of flexibility is required for leg placement.

This is an excellent position for turning fast. Once you learn Daffy with one leg forwards, learn with the opposite leg forwards to increase the skills in your toolbox. The position also lends itself to smaller moves as opposed to the all or nothing nature of the Straddle position. A flyer must be careful when picking grips up with the same side that has the leg forward so as to prevent burbling one's position. If this happens, switch to the other Daffy or fly in the next position we are going to talk about.

### LEG POSITION – SHELF

The Shelf, also called 'Hook' or 'Stall', is the most modern of all flying positions. It has both legs placed symmetrically behind the flyer with lower legs level

with the ground and the knees slightly in front of the torso. A good way to imagine the position is to hang yourself upside down from a climbing frame or mock up with the main support bar underneath your knees.

Due to the removal of the legs from in front of you compared with Daffy, it is the easiest position to pick up grips from and is fast to turn. However, for outfacing VFS points such as L, N or 15, having both legs behind you will increase unseen burbles and a Daffy in this situation would be better. It is generally an easier position to learn the basics than flying in Daffy, but a Straddle is considered better for exits and initial sub-terminal flying.

**4 It can be useful to switch between body positions when flying in head down groups.**  
By Swoop

**5 Head down is susceptible to 'skating' around the sky, which can be dangerous when learning. A coach can help you to fall straight down the tube and practice in the tunnel provides just such a 'tube' (complete with forgiving walls) as a reference.**  
By Swoop

The head down position, like all bodyflight positions, has a series of different body position placements and each can be used to help you fly in a more efficient manner. Getting good coaching at the start is the key to minimise the time you spend developing bad habits and maximise your learning. The speeds are faster and the margins for error are smaller but, once mastered, these positions offer the most dynamic and extreme flight modes possible. Stay safe out there! ●

**Ally Milne is a UK and European FF record holder and BPA VFS Silver medallist. He is sponsored by Airtec, UPT and Cookie Composites.**  
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