

in the bag

Hands On



Now's the time to pay attention to your only physical connection to the golf club — the grip **BY SCOTT KRAMER**

By re-gripping your clubs now — at the start of the season — you can instantly improve your game. How? Your hands will have better traction, so you won't squeeze as hard. That lack of hand tension will help you make a more fluid swing and hit more consistent shots.

What's particularly beneficial about new grips is that they're a relatively inexpensive change to make — you'll pay a fraction of the cost of new clubs, yet your clubs will still feel factory fresh to the touch.

Start by picking up a few grips in a golf shop. Hold them with your normal grip pressure and wear a glove if that's what you do when you play. Take notice of the grip width, as it influences ball flight. An undersized grip (one in which your hands overlap too much while holding) promotes increased hand action and can cause you to pull or hook

shots. It also creates tension in your forearms and shoulders. A grip that's too large for your hands will limit wrist rotation and can prevent a snap hook, but your shot won't go as far. It can also cause you to squeeze too hard just to hold onto it. Ultimately, you want a grip that you can hold comfortably without putting a chokehold on it.

As for the types of grips you can buy, natural and synthetic rubber grips have good traction and cost less, but generally need frequent cleaning and also lack durability because they retain moisture. Thermoplastic elastomer grips are often more durable than rubber, are softer, and don't hold moisture; wipe them and they're like new. They also stay tacky for longer, so they're great for golfers with drier skin. Their potential downside is that they sometimes feel like they're twisting around the shaft at impact. Key word there is "feel": In many cases, there is no twisting. But golfers will swear otherwise.

For 2010, the three largest grip manufacturers — Golf Pride, Lamkin and Winn — are offering new products, while several newcomers have also introduced grips that you may very well want to get your hands on. Here's a sampling. ■

Do It Yourself vs. Hire An Expert

You can change your own grips quickly, provided you know what to do and have the essentials (a razor blade, adhesive tape, solvent, towel and replacement grips). Pure Grips, one of the companies profiled here, has an all-new concept in which you can install grips in seconds by using an air compressor and an attachment that sticks into the butt end of its grips. The grip slides on as air flows through it.

Or, you can always pay a nominal fee to your local PGA professional to install grips for you, bearing in mind you may have to wait up to a day to get it done.

PURE Grips Pure Wrap
This all-weather, synthetic rubber newcomer is eco-friendly — it installs quickly with just air pressure. It provides optimal stability, as its elasticity combines with friction to ensure that the grip will not loosen or slip. The tackiness feels close to perfect, while the classic, perforated wrap offers medium firmness and moderate shock absorption. (\$5.50 each, puregrips.com)

Lamkin N-DUR
For woods and irons, this grip packs new 3GEN material, which is a synthetic rubber that's both soft and tacky. It absorbs plenty of impact vibration, thus softening all shots. It's also durable and low in torque, so it won't feel as if it's turning in your hands at impact. Here's the best part: Wipe the material with a wet cloth, and the tackiness reactivates to "day one" fresh. Its dual surface pattern and reduced taper enhance comfort. (\$8.99 each, lamkingrips.com)

Golf Pride Tour Wrap 2G
This 20-year-old classic one-piece, simulated wrap grip for woods and irons has been revamped this year. Its synthetic rubber was altered to bring out its tackiness and softness. It combines the look and feel of luxury leather with the durability and performance of high-tack rubber, and is offered in a range of sizes, including a new Jumbo with a straighter taper that allows for consistent grip pressure from club to club. (\$3.50 each, golfpride.com)

Winn LiteFirm
Featuring proprietary, durable and comfortable V17-PolyCord material, this grip is created using an advanced injection molding process that reduces grip weight — and thus overall club weight — to help golfers increase clubhead speed and generate more distance. Because it weighs roughly half as much as a conventional rubber grip, it allows you to better feel the clubhead throughout your swing. (\$8.49 each, winngrips.com)

Softspikes Black Widow Signature
From the popular cleat maker comes this 46-gram model for woods and irons that features a firm dual-compound composition, for enhanced feel in the fingertip contact points. An anti-slip surface pattern helps create more hand contact with less required grip pressure, reducing arm tension. It's a versatile grip for all weather conditions. (\$9.39 each, bwgrips.com)

UST Mamiya Pro DC
This shaft manufacturer's new 51-gram half-cord grip features a double compound that the company claims is preferred by better players seeking torsional strength in the upper hand. It feels firmer up top and soft in the middle and lower sections, helping golfers achieve better control and touch. (\$8.29 each, ustmamiya.com)

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