

Jerking and Heeling

Jerking and heeling are two entirely different maladies-originating from different areas of sensory input that must work together to deliver a good shot on target. Our vision, hands and brain must work in unison in order to locate a target, stabilize the muzzle on it and release the shot without adding unnecessary motion to the gun. It is easier than you imagine to deliver good shot placement.

The key to improving your shooting is to know what problem you are experiencing, why you are doing it and what to do to fix it. A little self-analysis will enable you to eliminate the problem-or in this case, problems-from your shooting program. Jerking the trigger is not much more than trying to make the gun discharge at the specific instant the eye sees the sights on the target. It is caused by visual input to the brain, but not necessarily in the way most people think.

The scenario goes something like this: You put the sights on the target, verify sight alignment, check out the sights' position on the target, then go back to sight alignment and so on. You are visually trying to get everything just right before operating the trigger. Before you know it, you are running out of oxygen because you've been holding your breath for several seconds, trying to get the sights in the proper perspective on the target, and you have yet to break the shot. Time is running out and the movement of the gun is increasing, so you quickly move (jerk) the trigger before things get any worse. *Note: If your knuckles turn white, you're gripping too tight, which will lead to heeling the gun. Loosen your grip so your trigger finger has a greater range of motion, and your shooting will improve.*

You could be dealing with another scenario that plays out as you move the trigger toward discharge. The more the trigger moves, the greater the movement of the sights becomes on the target. The perceived movement of the gun in relation to the target is increasing, so you jerk the trigger before the movement becomes even greater. In both of the above scenarios, your focus transitions from the gun toward the target, if not to the target, causing you to perceive an unacceptable degree of movement of the gun in relation to the target. This in turn causes your trigger finger to be reluctant to do its job in smoothly operating the trigger to release the shot. In an act of frustration, your brain tells your trigger finger to override the visual input and smash the trigger to get things moving. This, of course, pushes the muzzle off the target before the bullet is on its way, causing a sub-par shot.

In reality, the shot-delivery process should be nothing more than floating the top of the aligned front sight or dot on the perceived center of the target as you press the trigger until discharge occurs. The key is to keep your focus on the front sight until the bullet exits the muzzle. With your focus on the gun, you will perceive significantly less movement of the sights on the target, and there will be no reluctance in quickly and smoothly operating the trigger to deliver an accurate shot.

Here's a simple test so you can be sure your focus is on the front sight at the moment of discharge. You should see smoke and possibly flash at the muzzle when the bullet exits. Even in bright daylight, you should see an atmospheric disturbance at the muzzle every time discharge takes place. Heeling comes from gripping the gun too tight, which prevents your trigger finger from moving through its full range of motion to release the shot. The telltale sign on the target is hits in the 1-o'clock area for right-handed shooters or in the 11-o'clock area for left-handed shooters. Mechanically, the thumb of the

firing hand pushes the gun, causing the trigger to meet the frozen trigger finger in order to achieve discharge. This pushes the muzzle up and to the outside as discharge takes place.

The fix is to loosen the grip with the firing hand so the trigger finger has a full range of movement. If you are using two hands, increase the pressure with the support hand until it provides in the neighborhood of 60 percent of the total gripping force. This will free up the firing hand to optimize trigger control.

