

HOW TO KNOW IF YOUR BOW'S DRAW WEIGHT IS TOO HEAVY

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Are you drawing too much weight?

Getting a bow with the right draw weight is an individual endeavor. Everybody's different. There is no prize awarded to the archer who draws the heaviest weight.

The most obvious impact of having a bow with too much draw weight is that you can't draw it at all. If you can't get the string back, you can't shoot the bow. That's an easy one.

But even if you can draw the bow, that doesn't mean the weight isn't still too heavy. If it is, accuracy is sure to suffer. It really doesn't matter how fast your arrow is flying, or how much momentum it carries, if you can't put it where you want it.

Compound bow archers seem to be most apt to try drawing too much weight. They know if they can just get the string over the let-off hump, they'll hold much less weight at full draw. But that over-exertion at the front end can weaken you at full draw – especially if you're in a tournament situation, where you might have to draw and shoot 30-60 times, or if you're hunting and end up having to hold full draw for an extended period while waiting for a good shot opportunity.



Having to point the bow toward the sky is a sign of drawing too much weight.

If you have to point the bow up at the sky, or pull down toward your waist in order to get the string back on a compound bow, you're pulling too much weight. If you have to collapse your bow arm shoulder inward to get extra leverage, then the weight is too high. If you find yourself shaking at full draw, it's too much. If you can't get through a simple practice session without feeling fatigued, then you're pulling too much. You should be able to hold a compound bow directly in front of your torso, and draw the string without struggling.

If it's possible, reduce the weight by turning the limb bolts counter clockwise. Whatever you do to one bolt, do exactly the same thing to the other. If your bow already is set at the lowest draw weight possible, then you might have to get another bow with a lower draw weight range. Or, you might be able to get replacement limbs for your bow that are rated for a lower weight range.

Recurve and longbow archers almost invariably will draw much less weight than they would if they shot a compound bow. Compound bow archers who switch must understand there's no way they will draw and hold with their fingers the same weight they draw and hold with a release using a compound bow.

When you draw a 70-pound compound bow with 75 percent let-off, you're only holding about 18 pounds at full draw. When you draw a 50-pound recurve – assuming you have a 28-inch draw length – you're holding 50 pounds at full draw.

The most obvious sign that a recurve archer is drawing too much weight is he or she will shake at full draw. If you can't hold the string back for even a few seconds without shaking, you're pulling too much weight.



This archer is comfortably holding her bow at full draw. The weight is not too much for her.

Check your accuracy with bows of varying draw weights. If you're pretty consistent at 40 pounds, but then notice erratic arrow groups at 50 pounds, then 50 pounds is probably too much weight.

World renowned traditional Archer G. Fred Asbell recommends a test for determining if an archer is over-bowed. While bending at the waist and aiming at the ground, an archer draws the bow with the back of the bow hand just below the inside of the knee. If an archer cannot do this easily, he or she is likely not strong enough to shoot that draw weight.



Archers shooting takedown recurve bows can usually get lighter limbs to drop some draw weight. Those who shoot one-piece recurves or longbows are going to have to switch bows.

Just because you might not be strong enough for a certain draw weight right now doesn't mean you can't ever shoot that weight. The more you shoot, the stronger you'll get. Couple your practice sessions at lower draw weights with strength-training workouts aimed at your core and upper body muscles.

As you get stronger, increase your draw weight incrementally. If you notice any of the problems we've already discussed, back off. Over time, you should be able to reach your goal weight, and be able to handle that weight with ease.

Now you might say to yourself, "Well, I'll just keep shooting this heavy draw weight, and eventually, I'll get used to it."

That's a bad move. The whole time you are struggling with that heavy weight, you're tossing good shooting form out the window. A great deal of solid archery shooting form relies on muscle memory – training your muscles to know how to perform correctly during the act of shooting a bow. If you train your muscles to do the wrong thing, then that muscle memory is worthless.

When it comes to draw weight, don't go for the gusto. I'd rather be able to drive tacks with slower arrows, then have them fly screaming fast, but rarely hit those tacks.