

Chapter 1: What Your Body Has Been Trying to Tell You

You did not stop caring about bowling. You stopped feeling like yourself when you bowled.

That is the quiet sentence most instruction books never say out loud. The gap between who you were at the lane and who you are now does not announce itself. It creeps in as a sore shoulder the morning after league night. A ball that feels heavier than it used to. A spare you have made a hundred times that suddenly goes wide, and you cannot explain why. One afternoon you realize you are dreading Tuesdays instead of looking forward to them. That feeling has a name, and it is not decline. It is confusion — the confusion of someone whose body has changed but whose instruction has not kept up.

This chapter is the conversation most bowling books skip. We are going to have it.

The Honest Conversation Most Bowling Instruction Skips Entirely

Most bowling instruction is written for bodies in their thirties and forties. The fundamentals it teaches are sound. The physical assumptions underneath them are not always honest about what happens after sixty-five.

When a coach tells a senior bowler to "generate more rev rate," or to "drive through the ball at the line," that advice is not wrong in theory. In practice, it asks a sixty-eight-year-old shoulder to do something a thirty-five-year-old shoulder does differently. The instruction has not changed. The body has. And when the body does not comply, the bowler typically blames himself.

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"The most expensive thing in bowling is not equipment. It is the advice you follow that was never meant for you."

I have coached bowlers at every level for a long time. The seniors I respect most are not the ones who refuse to change. They are the ones who change early, change smartly, and keep bowling while their peers quietly quit.

This book is written for you specifically. Every technique, every piece of equipment advice, every adjustment — it comes from the physical reality of a body between sixty-five and eighty that still wants to compete, still finds joy in a clean spare, and deserves instruction that actually fits.

Why Scores Drop After 65 — and Why It Is Not Your Fault

Here is something the scoresheet does not tell you: the conditions creating your lower scores almost certainly began years before you noticed them on paper.

Ball speed decreases as muscle mass and flexibility decline with age. This is physiological and documented. A slower ball does not travel the lane the same way a faster ball does. It interacts with the oil pattern differently. It enters the pocket at a different angle. Everything downstream — pin action, carry percentage, spare leave frequency — shifts as a result¹.

Add to that the natural reduction in **grip strength** most people experience after sixty. Add some arthritic stiffness in the fingers. Add the reality that a ball drilled years ago for a younger hand may now fit poorly, causing you to squeeze it harder than necessary. You are fighting your equipment without knowing it.

Your scores did not drop because you stopped trying. They dropped because your body and your equipment quietly moved in opposite directions while the instruction you were following stayed exactly the same.

A senior bowler who threw a 16-lb ball for decades and switches to 13 lbs, properly fitted, will often see immediate score improvement — not because of technique, but because the equipment now matches the body delivering it².

The Five Physical Changes Aging Actually Brings to Your Game

Understanding these five areas is not about cataloguing your limitations. It is about seeing the full picture clearly, so you can address what is addressable and stop wasting energy on what is not.

Grip Strength

The muscles of the hand and forearm lose meaningful strength across the decades. For bowlers, this shows up as a thumb that does not release cleanly, fingers that tighten mid-swing to compensate, and a delivery that "muscles" the ball rather than swings it. The compensation creates exactly the shoulder and wrist strain you have probably already noticed.

Ball Speed

Reduced muscle power means reduced speed. Most senior bowlers generate less velocity than they did at forty. This is not a flaw to fix. It is a variable to work with, and later chapters will show you why a slower ball, properly managed, can actually improve your entry angle into the pocket.

Balance

The vestibular system, which governs your sense of balance, changes after sixty. The approach feels less stable. The slide foot does not always land where it used to. The finish position becomes harder to hold. This is not clumsiness. It is neurology, and it responds well to a shorter, more controlled approach.

Recovery

The morning after a three-game series at fifty felt different from the morning after one at seventy. Muscles and joints need more time to recover from the repetitive demand of bowling. Ignoring this creates the overuse injuries — wrist tendinitis, shoulder impingement, lower back strain — that end seasons unnecessarily.

Reaction Time

The time between seeing where your ball is going and being able to adjust is slightly longer now. This matters most in spare shooting, where a mid-approach correction used to happen automatically. The solution is not faster reflexes. It is a more consistent targeting system that requires fewer mid-shot corrections in the first place.



The Difference Between Declining and Adapting — and Why Only One of Them Is Optional

Decline is what your body does without your input. Adaptation is what you do in response. You have no authority over the first. You have complete authority over the second.

In a forum thread documented by the National Bowling Academy, a sixty-seven-year-old bowler described returning to competition after two and a half years away following a hip replacement. He started slowly, was patient with his rebuilt mechanics, and eventually worked back to a 195 average. He did not return to his old game. He built a better one for the body he had.

That is the distinction this entire book rests on.

Declining bowlers keep doing what they always did and wonder why it produces worse results each season. Adapting bowlers look honestly at what has changed, adjust the variables under their control, and often bowl more consistently in their seventies than they did in their fifties — because they are finally working with their bodies rather than against them.

The adaptation is not a consolation prize. In many cases, it is an upgrade.

A Self-Assessment: Where Are You Right Now?

Do this before your next session. It takes five minutes and requires no equipment except honesty.

- ✓ **Grip test:** Hold your ball at arm's length for ten seconds without squeezing. If you cannot do it comfortably, your ball is likely too heavy or poorly fitted for your current hand strength.
- ✓ **Speed observation:** Ask a friend to time how long your ball takes from release to the pins, or simply notice whether the ball seems to "run out of energy" before it reaches the pocket. A ball dying early is a speed indicator.
- ✓ **Balance check:** Take your normal approach without a ball. Notice whether you wobble at the finish position or have to step-catch yourself. Instability in a dry run will be worse with twelve pounds in your hand.
- ✓ **Recovery audit:** How do you feel the morning after you bowl? Mild muscle fatigue is normal. Joint pain, shoulder ache that lasts more than a day, or wrist soreness that recurs is information your body is sending about equipment or mechanics.
- ✓ **Targeting honesty:** In your last session, where did you miss most often — left, right, or inconsistently in both directions? A pattern of misses is not bad luck. It is diagnostic data.

No scoring system. No pass or fail. Just five honest observations that will make every chapter that follows more specific to you.

What This Book Will and Will Not Ask of You

This book will ask you to be honest about what has changed. It will ask you to try adjustments that may feel awkward at first. It will ask you to consider equipment changes, approach modifications, and targeting habits that may be different from what you have done for decades. None of that is fast or effortless. It is, however, achievable — and the bowlers who do it consistently do not stop playing. They play better, longer, and with less pain.

What this book will not ask: it will not ask you to pretend the changes are not real. It will not push you toward technique that belongs to a different body than the one you are actually in. It will not treat pain as weakness or adaptation as defeat.

As Krislyn Tyler, assistant manager at B&B Bowling Lanes in Fayetteville, put it when observing senior bowlers still competing well into their eighties and nineties: *"Bowling truly is a lifetime sport. To see people out here in their 80s and 90s still bowling, it gives you something to look forward to."*

That is not sentimentality. That is evidence. The game does not age out those who are willing to adapt. It rewards them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Score drops after sixty-five are overwhelmingly caused by equipment mismatch and unchanged technique, not effort or desire.
- ▶ The five physical changes that affect your game — grip, speed, balance, recovery, reaction time — are real, documented, and addressable.
- ▶ The difference between a bowler who quits and one who improves in their seventies is almost always adaptation, not physical talent.
- ▶ The five-minute pre-game diagnostic gives you specific, personal data that no general instruction can provide.
- ▶ This book works with your body as it is now, not as it was twenty years ago.

Now that you understand what your body has been signaling, the logical next question is this: when you release a ball down a lane, what is actually happening to it physically? Because the physics of a bowling ball in motion reveal something surprising — something that turns one of aging's most common frustrations into a hidden advantage. That is what Chapter 2 is about.