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**How Playing Golf Can Help Your Health**

**Researchers found that playing golf regularly, at least once a month, was associated with a lower risk of death.**

* **Among regular golfers, there was a significantly lower rate of death (15.1 percent) compared with the rest of the group who did not (24.6 percent).**
* **The study authors believe that the social nature of golf is valuable to individuals who may not be able to try a rigorous exercise routine.**

It’s no stretch to say that golf feels a bit lax compared to other sports. Instead of sweat-drenched, explosive athleticism, players walk (or drive) around a giant lawn in funny clothes.

But despite the game’s slow-paced reputation, new research indicates that for older individuals, golfing regularly could be a hole-in-one for health.

In findings to be presented at the American Stroke Association’s International Stroke Conference in Los Angeles, researchers found that playing golf regularly, at least once a month, was associated with a lower risk of death. One major caveat, however: researchers didn’t distinguish whether players walked or used a golf cart while playing.

Researchers used data from the Cardiovascular Health Study (CHS), an observational study of cardiovascular disease risk in adults 65 years and older — the average age was 72. From 1989 through 1999 participants in the study regularly had physical checkups and clinical visits. At the end of the 10 years, they were evaluated for any cardiovascular events, such as heart attack or stroke.

The study included roughly 5,900 individuals, of which 384 played golf. At follow-up, 8.1 percent of those who played golf had suffered strokes, and 9.8 percent had heart attacks. The number of cardiovascular events for golfers didn’t differ significantly from the rest of the group.

However, when compared with overall mortality statistics, researchers found something interesting.

Among regular golfers, there was a significantly lower rate of death (15.1 percent) compared with the rest of the group who did not (24.6 percent).

“The investigators may be on to something unique. Walking a golf course is a great aerobic activity and adds to the benefits received from regular aerobic activity. Furthermore, people are engaged in the game and do not equate the walking, let alone the swinging of the clubs, as exercise,” said Dr. Guy L. Mintz, [Director of Cardiovascular Health & Lipidology](https://www.guymintzmd.com/bio), Sandra Atlas Bass Heart Hospital, Manhasset, New York. Dr. Mintz was not affiliated with the research.

Both Mintz and the authors of the report believe that the social nature of golf — being able to casually walk around with friends, talking, and relaxing — are likely of value to older people who may not be able to take on a more rigorous exercise routine.

“There is consistent data about benefit of moderate intensity regular exercise. Certain physical activities may be too strenuous on cardiovascular systems and joints and people have problems in regularly participating, such as weight training. Certain activities like walking and cycling may be too monotonous to generate interest as regular activities,” said Dr. Adnan Qureshi, lead author and executive director of the Zeenat Qureshi Stroke Institutes and professor of neurology at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri.

**Does golf count as a physical activity?**

Golf is a sport played by about 25 million Americans. Nonetheless, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](https://www.hhs.gov/fitness/be-active/physical-activity-guidelines-for-americans/index.html) do not include it among their list of recommended physical activities.

Qureshi hopes that their research may begin to change that.

A big problem facing many older Americans is simply getting enough exercise. Qureshi suggests that golf is an enticing solution to this problem.

“While walking and low intensity jogging may be comparable exercise, they lack the competitive excitement of golf,” he said. “Regular exercise, exposure to a less polluted environment, and social interactions provided by golf are all positive for health.

According to the American Heart Association, [69 percent of adults in the U.S. have obesity or are overweight](https://www.healthline.com/health/heart-disease/exercise-statistics#1), and that number is climbing. As adults age they are also less likely to exercise regularly.

And physical activity is just as important in old age. Its benefits include preventing bone loss, building muscle strength, improving coordination and balance, and mitigating the risk of age-related disease.

**Benefits of golf**

The health benefits of golf also appear to be fairly consistent.

A 2016 review in the [British Journal of Sports Medicine](https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/51/1/12) concluded that both doctors and policymakers should encourage more people to play golf because of its association with “improved physical health and mental well-being, and a potential contribution to increased life expectancy.”

[Another review](https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/52/22/1426.long) two years later found that golf was associated with increased life expectancy, improving cardiovascular risk factors, and mental well-being.

“I do believe golf should be considered an aerobic activity by the U.S. Department of Health and Human services. Better eating, reduced cardiovascular risk factors, improved socialization, more walking are all possible mechanisms as to why golf was so beneficial,” said Dr. Mintz.

“I would like to see further research regarding mechanisms for the reduction in mortality associated with golf including a detailed breakdown of frequency of playing golf, walking vs. riding in carts, and cardiovascular risk factors. Golf is definitely a way to hit a hole-in-one in the game of life,” he said.