

Emotional support leads to sporting success

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Sportsmen and women could get the edge on their opponents by accepting more emotional support in their personal and professional lives. A study by the University of Exeter, published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, shows the extent to which a sympathetic ear or regular words of encouragement can improve sports performance.

Previous studies by the University of Exeter have linked 'social support' to [performance](#) in golf and other sports. Now for the first time, researchers have tested the importance of [social support](#) by providing individually-tailored support to sportsmen and then measuring its impact on performance.

The study focused on three male [golfers](#), who all competed at regional, national and international level. For half of the study the golfers were each given regular one-on-one support by the lead researcher, Dr Paul Freeman of the University of Exeter. Dr Freeman offered a range of support including listening to the golfers as they talked through their problems, offering encouragement and reassurance before competitions, and helping with practical issues, such as organising accommodation during competitions. To provide comparative data, the researchers recorded the performance of the three golfers prior to receiving the support from Dr Freeman.

All three golfers performed better when they were receiving support from Dr Freeman. The players improved by an average of 1.78 shots per round, which could be significant at high-level golf.

Dr Paul Freeman of the University of Exeter, lead author on the study, said: "The benefits of social support on sports performance have been demonstrated in previous studies. In this study we have taken our understanding of the significance of social support a step further. By actually providing support to the golfers we were able to measure the actual improvement in performance. It is significant that the support I offered, as a relative stranger, had such a marked influence on their results. The findings suggest that amateur and professional athletes would benefit from seeking social support, whether this is from a friend or family member or even from a professional."

The researchers believe their findings would be relevant for other sports, as well as golf. Social support has also been shown to influence other areas of life, including performance at work. Previous research has also identified its role in addressing health issues such as weight loss and smoking cessation. Therefore, these findings could have wide-reaching relevance.

Source: University of Exeter ([news](#) : [web](#))

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