

Golfing regularly could be a hole-in-one for older adults' health

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Regularly golfing—at least once per month—was found to lower the risk of death among older adults, according to preliminary research to be presented at the American Stroke Association's International Stroke Conference 2020—Feb. 19-21 in Los Angeles, a world premier meeting for researchers and clinicians dedicated to the science of stroke and brain health.

Golf, a sport played by approximately 25 million Americans, can provide benefits such as stress reduction and [regular exercise](#). Due to its [social nature](#) and controlled pace, people often maintain motivation and the ability to continue playing the sport even in older age and after suffering [heart attack](#) or stroke.

"Our study is perhaps the first of its kind to evaluate the long-term health benefits of golf, particularly one of the most popular sports among older people in many countries," said Adnan Qureshi, M.D., lead author and executive director of the Zeenat Qureshi Stroke Institutes and professor of neurology at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. "The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans does not yet include golf in the list of recommended physical activities. Therefore, we are hopeful our research findings could help to expand the options for adults to include golf."

Researchers analyzed data from the Cardiovascular Health Study, a population-based observational study of risk factors for heart disease and stroke in adults 65 and older. Starting in 1989 and continuing through

1999, participants had extensive annual clinical exams and clinic visits every six months for the 10-year period. Once clinic visits ended, patients were contacted by phone to determine any occurrences of heart attack and stroke events. Patients who played golf at least once a month were considered regular golfers.

Out of almost 5,900 participants, average age 72, researchers identified 384 golfers (41.9% men). During follow-up, 8.1% of the golfers had suffered strokes and 9.8% of the golfers had heart attacks. When comparing [death rates](#) among golfers and non-golfers, researchers found a significantly lower rate of death among golfers compared to non-golfers, 15.1% compared to 24.6%, respectively.

"While walking and low intensity jogging may be comparable exercise, they lack the competitive excitement of golf," Qureshi said. "Regular exercise, exposure to a less polluted environment and social interactions provided by golf are all positive for health. Another positive is that [older adults](#) can continue to play golf, unlike other more strenuous sports such as football, boxing and tennis. Additional positive aspects are stress relief and relaxation, which golf appears better suited for than other sports."

While researchers were unable to determine if golfing had a direct impact on lowering the risk of heart attack or stroke, they are currently performing additional analyses to identify what other health conditions may benefit from regularly playing golf. They also did not specify whether the golfers walked or rode in a golf cart. Researchers are currently performing additional analyses to determine whether gender and race of golfers has any effect on their findings.

Provided by American Heart Association

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