

Hitting the links could be a hole in one for your health

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While golfing was once known as the game of kings, the American Heart Association, the world's leading nonprofit organization focused on heart

and brain health for all, says you don't have to be royalty or a professional player to reap health benefits from hitting the links at your local golf course. Research presented at the Association's International Stroke Conference in 2020 found that regularly golfing—at least once per month—lowered the risk of death, especially among older adults.

Golfing can provide benefits such as stress reduction and regular exercise. Due to its [social nature](#) and typically slower, controlled pace, people of most all ages and physical fitness levels can play the sport.

"The [regular exercise](#), time spent outside enjoying nature, [social interaction](#) and even the friendly competition of a round of golf are all elements that can foster mental and physical wellbeing," said Donald M. Lloyd-Jones, M.D., Sc.M., FAHA, president of the American Heart Association and chair of the department of preventive medicine, the Eileen M. Foell Professor of Heart Research and professor of preventive medicine, medicine and pediatrics at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. "The past couple of years have been hard and many of us have picked up some unhealthy lifestyle behaviors such as more eating and less [physical activity](#), and we've missed the company of friends and family. I think golfing can offer a great opportunity to start venturing back out into an enjoyable activity that can feed our hearts and our souls."

For the study on golfing, researchers from the University of Missouri in Columbia, 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. Out of nearly 5,900 participants, average age 72, researchers identified nearly 400 regular golfers. During the 10-year follow-up period, death rates for golfers were significantly lower than for non-golfers.

A comprehensive review of research published in the *British Journal of*

Sports Medicine analyzed more than 300 scientific studies, leading a panel of 25 public health experts to issue an international consensus statement, from several sporting and golf organizations, noting the health and social benefits of golf.

"The American Heart Association recommends most people get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise a week. Golfing qualifies as a moderate-intensity exercise, specifically if you are walking an 18-hole course, carrying your golf clubs," said Lloyd-Jones. "While golfing, you're increasing your [heart](#) rate and blood flow, enhancing brain stimulation, improving your balance and socializing. Even if you are riding in a cart and playing a short course of only nine holes, you're still being physically active, and we know any movement is better than none."

There are a few safety measures to take into consideration before hitting the greens. Before you start, warm up with a few stretching exercises and be sure to wear sunscreen even on cloudy days. Also, stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and don't get overheated. Be aware of the signs of a heat stroke and if you or your fellow golfers show any of these symptoms, call 9-1-1 and seek emergency medical help right away:

- Fever (temperature above 104 °F)
- Irrational behavior
- Extreme confusion
- Dry, hot, and red skin
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Rapid, weak pulse
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness

Provided by American Heart Association

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