

Golf prolongs life

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Golf can be a good investment for the health, according to a new study from the Swedish medical university Karolinska Institutet. The death rate for golfers is 40 per cent lower than for other people of the same sex, age and socioeconomic status, which correspond to a 5 year increase in life expectancy. Golfers with a low handicap are the safest.

It is a well-known fact that exercise is good for the health, but the expected health gains of particular activities are still largely unknown. A team of researchers from Karolinska Institutet has now presented a study of the health effects of golf – a low-intensity form of exercise in which over 600,000 Swedes engage.

The study, which is published in *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, is based on data from 300,000 Swedish golfers and shows that golf has beneficial health effects. The death rate amongst golfers is 40 per cent lower than the rest of the population, which equates to an increased life expectancy of five years.

Professor Anders Ahlbom, who has led the study with Bahman Farahmand is not surprised at the result, as he believes that there are several aspects of the game that are proved to be good for the health.

"A round of golf means being outside for four or five hours, walking at a fast pace for six to seven kilometres, something which is known to be good for the health," he says. "People play golf into old age, and there are also positive social and psychological aspects to the game that can be of help."

The study does not rule out that other factors than the actual playing, such as a generally healthy lifestyle, are also behind the lower death rate observed amongst golfers. However, the researchers believe it is likely that the playing of the game in itself has a significant impact on health.

Golf players have a lower death rate regardless of sex, age and social group. The effect is greater for golfers from blue-collar professions than for those from white-collar professions. The lowest rates are found in the group of players with the lowest handicap (i.e. the best golfers).

"Maintaining a low handicap involves playing a lot, so this supports the idea that it is largely the game itself that is good for the health," says Professor Ahlbom.

Source: Karolinska Institutet

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