

R&A

GOLF AND HEALTH 2021-2025



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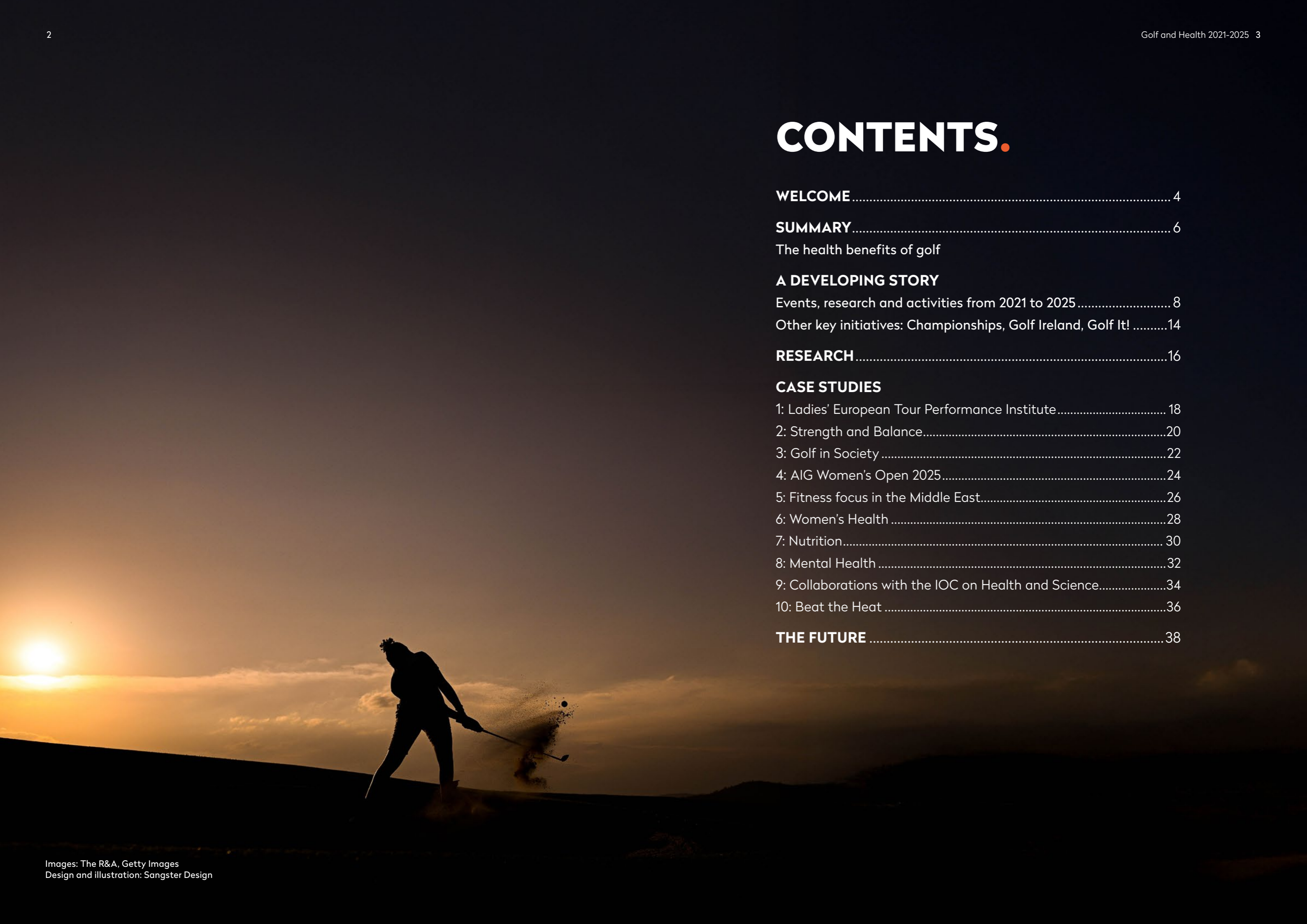
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WELCOME.

Welcome to The R&A's new report on golf and health, building on the initial 2016-2020 edition. The health benefits of playing golf are significant and they are enjoyed by golfers across the world. It is a sport that can be played from the age of two to over 100, enjoyed in the fresh air in many different forms (and even indoors too), and boosts mental wellbeing in a social environment. Even following your favourites by walking at golf events is good for you.

These facts alone have long been known by golfers themselves but educating those beyond the sport about its many health benefits, including non-golfers, public health professionals and governments, was a key reason why the first report was published in 2020.

Since then, health has started to become part of the sport's narrative. The benefits are more visible, people are more aware. The golf industry, as a collective, has become more effective at positioning the sport as a health-enhancing activity that can be enjoyed by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Jonathan Edwards CBE, the famed former Olympic triple jump champion and now a Global Ambassador for The R&A, tells his own story. "When I retired from athletics there were two things I wanted to do," Edwards, 59, explains. "One was to go on a skiing holiday and the other was to play golf."

"Golf has now become a really important part of my life. I just fell in love with it. I love playing with my mates in a four-ball and I love being outside, but I didn't fully appreciate it was actually really good for my health and fitness."

"So the way I approach golf has changed. When I first started it was very much a performance thing, working hard on my short game for example, which is from my athletics background. Now what is important to me is the social element and the mental health and fitness benefits of the game, as opposed to just trying to get the lowest possible score. I'd be lost without golf."

Given an epidemic of physical inactivity-related disease in most of the world's populations – physical inactivity is responsible for more than three million deaths worldwide – golf has heeded the call from the World Health Organization (WHO) for action.

Since 2016, The R&A and its partners, including the World Golf Foundation (WGF), the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the European Tour Group, have sought to: raise awareness of the health benefits of golf to encourage interest in participation; improve the sport's image; and increase advocacy for golf by government agencies and public health bodies.

With participation levels continuing to rise – there are now over 108 million golfers in The R&A's affiliated regions across the world (outside the USA and Mexico) – the sport can continue to make its mark with targeted health messaging.

Initially, the Golf & Health Project, supported by The R&A and the other WGF partners, was formed to produce and publish high quality science that evidences golf's physical and mental health benefits to target existing golfers, non-golfers, golf bodies and policy makers in government and health.

The R&A played a key role in the Project by part-funding research undertaken by Dr Andrew Murray of the University of Edinburgh, who is the lead research scientist.

GOLFERS LIVE, ON AVERAGE



YEARS LONGER

Dr Murray completed his PhD at the University of Edinburgh in 2020, where he was supervised by Dr Roger Hawkes, Prof Nanette Mutrie and Prof Liz Grant, world leaders in sport for health and global health.

Dr Murray is now Chief Medical Officer for the European Tour Group, who advises The R&A, various governments, and the UK International Olympic Committee Research Centre of Excellence for illness and injury prevention.

The R&A has also directly supported other activity, including being the sole funder of a Strength and Balance Study, and sponsoring International Congresses on Golf and Health. Furthermore, The R&A Foundation has supported research and community initiatives.

While research was the initial focus, The R&A now collaborates with national federations and others to share key messages and assets on the health benefits of golf, promoting this to the general public, policy makers and the media, including at The Open and the AIG Women's Open.

Robust research, data and key findings have been regularly published in world-leading international journals to support the principle that golf can lead to greater health and wellness benefits for participants and spectators attending events. Resultantly, golf can help reduce health costs and can add value to health systems.

Mark Darbon, Chief Executive of The R&A, said, "Over a number of years, we have sought to: raise awareness of the health benefits of golf to encourage interest in participation by people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, genders and ethnicities; improve the sport's image; and increase advocacy for golf by government agencies and public health bodies."

"Working with the likes of the World Health Organization, the DP World Tour, other golf organisations and respected sports medics like Dr Andrew Murray, we have been involved in new scientific research and continue to promote golf as a health-enhancing activity."

This new report brings together some of what we know about the health benefits of golf over the last five years. It details these benefits by summarising the scientific research, the public exposure and increased interest among national federations, policy makers and other organisations. Ten case studies highlight the impact of collective endeavours, spanning various work across the world.

By understanding the health benefits of golf, we can all be healthier and happier as golfers and encourage others to take up the sport. The golf industry and facilities can also maximise the benefits by sharing the information to their audiences, while policy and decision makers can take key actions.

Enjoy the report.



“Working with organisations and respected sports medics, we have been involved in new scientific research and continue to promote golf as a health-enhancing activity.”

MARK DARBON,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
THE R&A

“Golf has now become a really important part of my life. I love playing with my mates in a four-ball and I love being outside, but I didn't fully appreciate it was actually really good for my health and fitness.”

JONATHAN EDWARDS,
R&A GLOBAL AMBASSADOR

GOLF CAN BE PLAYED
FROM THE AGE OF TWO TO OVER



SUMMARY.

There are significant physical, mental and social benefits to be gained from playing golf. The sport is uniquely placed to tackle some of society's biggest challenges – from inactivity and loneliness, to healthy ageing and mental health – by turning everyday moments into life changing experiences: a child striking their first shot with a gleeful grin, to their grandparent walking off the 18th knowing golf has boosted their wellbeing.

This report brings together what is known about the health benefits of the sport. It details these benefits by summarising activities since 2021, highlighting scientific research, the public exposure and increased interest among national federations, golf facilities, policy makers, public health bodies and other organisations.

A number of case studies highlight the impact of collective endeavours, spanning various countries across the world and at leading professional and amateur events.

The best scientific evidence shows that:

- Golf can provide health-enhancing levels of physical activity – with golfers living longer, and enjoying comprehensive physical, social and mental health benefits.
- These benefits are available to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- All World Health Organization/national governments key criteria for health-enhancing physical activity can be met through playing golf – a key area to highlight to local and national policy makers.

Suggested actions for golfers:

- Take regular exercise, including golf. It is one of the best things you can do for your health.
- Enjoy golf across all formats and encourage others to take it up.

Suggested actions for national federations and the golf industry:

- Share the health benefits of the sport with golfers, potential golfers, industry colleagues and policy makers.
- Promote inclusivity – encourage increased participation by developing welcoming environments and price structures that are accessible to all, including beginners.
- Inspire and recruit women and girls, people with a disability and people from diverse backgrounds to play golf.
- Share good practice and encourage the participation of golf facilities in health initiatives. Facilities, such as Golf It! in Glasgow, offer unique aspects to transform wellbeing and boost local communities.
- Multi-functionality – encourage non-golf related facilities and use.

Suggested actions for policy makers and leaders:

- Work with national federations to promote golf and, where relevant, include golf as a moderate intensity physical activity in policy documents, guidance and recommendations.
- By galvanising policy makers behind a bold social impact agenda, the sport can be a natural partner for governments and purpose-driven investors to open the door to new and exciting revenue streams. Specific data can prove golf's value and guide smarter decisions to drive growth in the sport.
- Share this summary and golf's benefits with regional and national government.

THE BENEFITS OF GOLF FOR HEALTH



Golfers live longer and are healthier and happier. On average, golfers live five years longer than non-golfers.

Golf can help strength and balance, improve quality of life and provide aerobic exercise.



Golf can help prevent and treat 40 major chronic diseases.



Spectators walk between 5-6 miles on average and can burn more than 1,000 calories per day.

Golf provides social interaction, a significant protective factor for mental health and wellbeing.



Playing golf each week can help ensure you meet World Health Organization physical activity guidelines.

On a regular 18-hole course, most players will walk between four and five miles, burning up to 2,000 calories.



Golf can be played by people of all ages and abilities, including with a disability.



Golf can help reduce health costs and can add value to health systems through social impact.



A DEVELOPING STORY.

JULY 2022



International Congress on Golf and Health

“We’re globally trying to promote physical activity and increase participation, for the health benefits, for the many social benefits and enjoyment that sport – particularly golf – can bring.”

FIONA BULL, HEAD OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, WHO

The 2nd International Congress on Golf and Health was staged in Edinburgh to further highlight the sport’s health-enhancing benefits for golfers of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh hosted leading medical professionals and research experts from across the globe as the world’s best golfers competed in major championships in Scotland during that summer.

The 2nd International Congress followed on from the successful 2018 event in London, which had input from the World Health Organization (WHO), national government, international governing bodies and world-leading research regarding all aspects of golf, health and performance.

The 2022 edition took place straight after The 150th Open in St Andrews and the same week as the Senior Open at Gleneagles. The AIG Women’s Open was also staged at Muirfield. Each championship highlighted the physical, mental and social benefits by playing the sport and also spectating. Leading individuals from across golf and health attended a reception to open the Congress, ahead of new research presented by researchers.

Maree Todd, Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport in Scotland, said, “The Congress was a fantastic opportunity to share knowledge and experience, to celebrate what golf is accomplishing, and to understand barriers to participation and how we can work to remove them.”

Two-time winner on the Ladies’ European Tour and former Order of Merit winner, Beth Allen, was part of the panel at the Congress.

Fiona Bull, Head of Physical Activity, WHO, added, “We’re globally trying to promote physical activity and increase participation, for the health benefits, for the many social benefits and enjoyment that sport – particularly golf – can bring, and learn from the research that’s being shared.

“I think the challenge is to make golf inclusive. It has a history, a perception amongst many, perhaps to be less inclusive, whether that’s for people of different economic advantage, gender or age. People won’t come unless there’s good opportunities created, welcoming clubs and ways in which they can start for the first time or return to it.”

Charlie Foster, Professor of Physical Activity & Public Health at Bristol University, said, “The Congress was a great event to bring together people from all over the world to share their knowledge and pool this information so we can decide the most important thing to do next when it comes to this work.”

AUGUST 2022



‘Golf is Good’ backed by Gareth Bale in Wales

A cutting-edge animation featuring football star Gareth Bale was rolled out in Wales as part of a new campaign to encourage people to play golf to improve their health and lifestyle.

‘Golf is Good’, a new global project by The R&A, was piloted in Wales in partnership with Wales Golf, to build on scientific research to promote the health and wellbeing benefits of playing the sport through creative storytelling. Using animated video, the campaign launch told the story of how three characters from different backgrounds are inspired into golf and go on to reap the mental, physical and social benefits.

R&A Global Ambassador Bale, the Welsh football icon who played an instrumental role in leading his country to the World Cup in 2022, featured in a new animation.

The engaging video shows golf lover Bale reaping the benefits of golf for health away from his pressures of life under the media spotlight as an international footballer. It was broadcast on Sky Sports in Wales and across the digital platforms of Wales Golf.

The campaign also featured static resources, as well as further broadcast coverage and across social media. As a result of the campaign, 66% of non-golfers said they are likely to consider playing golf because of the health benefits.

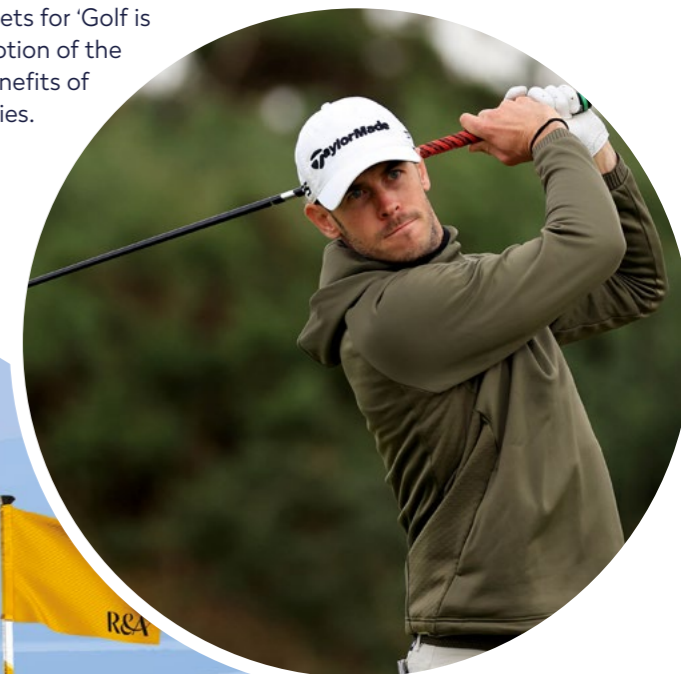
Bale said, “I’m proud to be involved in this health campaign with The R&A and it’s great that Wales is the pilot market. Through the animated video, I’m keen to show how golf helps me in my life. It allows me to get away from football, socialise with others in green space and enjoy a form of exercise. I hope the campaign shows people that golf has many health benefits and can keep you fit, happy and be enjoyed by everyone.”

The R&A, working with sport, fitness and wellbeing agency MATTA and animators Ritzy, initially targeted Wales for the pilot health campaign ahead of a global roll-out. The initiative, endorsed by the British Heart Foundation, ran across Wales that summer, including in golf clubs, on television and digital media, to encourage new and lapsed golfers into the sport.

Now Argentina, Australia, Colombia, Denmark, New Zealand and South Africa are among a number of countries to have received R&A digital assets for ‘Golf is Good’ to activate promotion of the health and wellbeing benefits of the sport in their territories. The resources (and new ones) are available for countries to use.

“Through the animated video, I’m keen to show how golf helps me in my life. It allows me to get away from football, socialise with others in green space and enjoy a form of exercise.”

GARETH BALE, R&A GLOBAL AMBASSADOR



Pictured from left to right: Dr Andrew Murray; panelists at the Congress in Edinburgh; Gareth Bale as illustrated in the animated video and playing golf.

JANUARY 2024



Finland embraces 'Golf is Good'

The Finnish Golf Union cemented its longstanding commitment to the health benefits of the sport by embracing The R&A's 'Golf is Good' campaign. The governing body had long recognised golf's value as a tool to promote health and wellbeing, having commissioned social return on investment analysis to support its efforts.

However, it had not rallied around a single unified campaign until it was introduced to 'Golf is Good' in October 2023. After discussions with The R&A team, the union unveiled a nationwide campaign to 250 golf clubs in January 2024, receiving a positive response.

Marika Voss, the Union's Head of Communications and Project Leader, described how support with translating the materials into Finnish and Swedish had paved the way for a smooth implementation. "Once we settled on the translations, things started to roll quickly," she said. "Our in-house designer adapted the text into visual materials and videos in a cost-effective way.

"For the first time, we were working with animated content, which made adaptation easier. With real-life photos, it's more important that the backgrounds and people look Finnish or at least 'familiar' to our audience. In practice, we didn't need to make significant modifications."

The campaign launched at the Golf Expo in March 2024 and the Union ensured widespread coverage across various platforms, including its website, newsletters, social media and magazines. It also launched a seven-week advertising effort at railway stations (pictured left).

To personalise the campaign, it supplemented the 'Golf is Good' materials with player stories, 'Health Thursdays', and expert blogs on golf's health benefits, particularly supporting its Women & Golf initiative.

"On an individual level, people find the topic engaging," added Marika.

"There's a wealth of supporting facts that can be adapted into various formats – interviews, social media, challenges, golf magazines, brochures and lectures. Our member clubs have also been actively using the campaign materials."

A social media campaign that ran from spring to autumn featured a call to action, leading users to a dedicated beginner golfer website. It garnered 280,000 impressions and over 11,000 clicks.

Marika continued, "People of all ages care about their wellbeing, and health is a hot topic in the media, especially in discussions around inactivity. Modern devices also allow various ways to track movement, which helps with motivation. At club level, the materials are easy to use, and the theme resonates across different age groups."

The Union also worked to develop a greater understanding of a person's journey from seeing the ads, to finding an entry point to golf and converting to club engagement. Another aim was to sign an influential ambassador to lend the campaign a greater profile and reach a more diverse audience, following the success of Wales Golf with Gareth Bale.

"No single sport, including golf, can solve the issue of inactivity on its own, but we want to be part of the solution," said Marika. "In Finland, we are the second-largest sports federation in terms of membership. Golf has huge potential to make a difference.

"The best thing about golf is that the physical activity happens almost effortlessly while you play. I always use my father as an example – he's almost 70. He drives to the grocery store and the gym, but he always walks on his golf round, sometimes even twice a day.

"It's also fascinating how the way you play and the focus on health benefits evolve with age. These days, I especially enjoy the relaxed time with friends and family on the course – without my phone."

JANUARY 2023



Golf on Prescription

A pioneering health initiative was piloted in Fife, Scotland in 2022 with golf 'prescribed' for individuals to encourage a more active lifestyle.

The R&A and the University of St Andrews School of Medicine collaborated with partner organisations to develop 'Golf for Health' – a pilot social prescribing project that aimed to connect eligible primary care patients with appropriate golf activities in Fife.

Researchers in the School developed a model in partnership with The R&A, Fife Golf Trust, NHS Fife, Scottish Golf, PGA Scotland, the European Tour Group and the Ladies' European Tour to enable primary care professionals and community link workers to prescribe golf for eligible patients.

With the region staging The 150th Open in St Andrews, the initiative was rolled out by golf clubs through healthcare professionals to allow patients to experience the widespread physical, mental and social benefits that the sport offers.

Medical practices in Fife were invited to take part in the pilot study, with participating practices linked with initially four local golf clubs offering a six-to-eight week, free-of-charge programme. The clubs running the programme were Cluny Clays, Dunfermline, Dunnikier Park and Elmwood. Around 30 participants were initially involved.

Frank Sullivan, Professor of Primary Care Medicine and Medical School Director of Research at the University of St Andrews, lead a team of expert academics in the School of Medicine to support the activity.

"This pilot initiative has been carefully designed to offer an accessible and social introduction to golf and to provide long-term health and wellbeing benefits for patients across Fife," said Sullivan.

"Our focus on developing connection pathways that are acceptable and feasible to implement for all involved is crucial. The most effective intervention in the world will not achieve its intended outcomes if patients are not connected with it."

Linda Duncan, pictured right, one of the participants at Cluny, said, "Golf has become something for me. It's helped me get out in the fresh air and meet other people. The health benefits for me have been 10, 20, 30-fold."

Through The R&A Foundation, funding was committed to the 'Golf for Health' project to support research at the University and the delivery of pilot golf packages by golf partners. The project was also supported by founding partner ISPS Handa through their work with the University.

Physical inactivity is associated with one in six deaths in the UK and costs the nation's economy £7.4 billion per year. Inactivity levels in the UK increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, with participation in golf known to increase physical activity levels and improve physical and mental health and wellbeing. The findings of the pilot continue to be evaluated and assessed for the feasibility of a larger-scale roll-out across Scotland and the UK.

Kevin Barker, Director – Golf Development – GB&I and Africa at The R&A, added, "We see social prescription as a great way for golf to contribute to the health of communities and to provide people with opportunities to enjoy playing the sport throughout their lifetime."

For more information on the 'Golf on Prescription' project, email eagle@st-andrews.ac.uk

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KEVIN BARKER, DIRECTOR - GOLF DEVELOPMENT - GB&I AND AFRICA, THE R&A

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“
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MARIKA VOSS,
HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS,
FINNISH GOLF UNION

”

51% OF THE GB&I POPULATION
CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO
BE IN GOOD HEALTH...

...BUT THIS RISES TO 72% OF GOLFERS.



JANUARY 2025



International Congress on Golf and Health

The 3rd International Congress on Golf and Health returned to Scotland, placing a focus on mental health and wellness. The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh again hosted the world leading scientific congress over two days of sessions, with experts in attendance from The R&A, Ladies' European Tour, DP World Tour, G4D Tour, the Confederation of Professional Golf and delegates from over 20 countries.

The conference shared insights on the health benefits of golf, with golfers enjoying a reduction in over 40 major chronic diseases, better wellbeing and length of life.

Dr Andrew Murray was at the forefront of organising the event. "It was a Congress bigger than ever before, with more speakers too, which was fantastic," said Murray, pictured left with Stephen Gallacher. "It was a great opportunity to get together and then think about the health benefits of golf – how we can promote health through major events, how we can help people be at their best, maximizing performance and decreasing illness and injury. Then it's just about giving everyone the opportunity to play golf."

Gallacher, the Ryder Cup star and four-time DP World Tour winner, was among those who took part in the discussions as delegates learned about the mental fitness of competing at the highest level.

Gallacher, who played for 28 years on the DP World Tour and runs the successful Stephen Gallacher Foundation, said, "The great thing about the conference was that it was all about golf, all about the positives of the sport for longevity of life. You can start at such a young age and you can still be playing at such a late age."

"It was important also to discuss how much the golfing world has changed, how much the health side has come into it. It's changed a lot since I was a kid, with proper advice on nutrition, recovery and hydration. There is so much data and technology to plot their goals."

Attendees also delved into key topics like injury prevention and management, adaptations for disabled golfers, nutrition and strength and conditioning.

Maree Todd, Sport Minister at the Scottish Government, said, "Regular physical activity and participation in sport is one of the best things you can do for physical, mental and social health. The Congress was a fantastic opportunity to share knowledge and experience."

Dr Julia Kettinen, researcher and Golf Exercise Medicine Specialist, added, "Our research highlights that golf can help people achieve the physical activity they need. Golf also kept senior golfers active during the Covid-19 pandemic and supported their quality of life."

Although there is compelling evidence of mental health and wellbeing benefits through golf and other sports, life as a professional athlete can be incredibly demanding, with pressure to perform, much time away from friends and family, and at times scrutiny on social media and in the media.

The golfing industry has recognised these challenges and conducted research with the players to implement mental health and wellbeing toolkits, emergency action plans, mind gyms, and a network of specialists for the players, collaborating with tennis and Formula 1 experts who also have intensive travel schedules.

Dr Phil Hopley, Consultant Psychiatrist at Cognacity, who has been instrumental as Mental Fitness Coach with the McLaren F1 Team, said, "We've all got mental health, but it changes sometimes across the course of a week, sometimes during the course of the day. So we can be flourishing or can be mentally well, or we can be struggling a bit, have a mental health problem or a mental disorder."

"Cognacity are delighted to be working with The R&A and the DP World Tour providing psychology and mental fitness support to players, caddies and Tour staff."

"The untimely passing of top professional golfer Grayson Murray was a painful reminder of how challenging life on Tour can be. That is why the collaborative work that golf is prioritising with International Olympic Committee mental health experts and the provision of industry leading facilities like the Mental Fitness Centre at the Dubai Desert Classic is so important."

JULY 2025



'Walk To Win' at The Open with Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest athletes of all-time, has backed the 'Walk To Win' challenge at The Open in recent years, most recently at Royal Portrush in 2025.

Highlighting the health benefits of spectating at the Championship, the step challenge offered the chance of a star prize to play a round with Edwards over the Dunluce Links. Edwards, 59, set the triple jump world record (18.29m) at the World Championships in Gothenburg in 1995 and it remains one of the longest-standing milestones in athletics.

Such is his love for golf, the decorated Brit is a R&A Global Ambassador – and also fronted 'Walk To Win' at The 152nd Open at Royal Troon. Over 6,700 people took part, walking 168,753,944 steps – the equivalent of more than three times round the world.

A lucky winner and two friends went on to play with Edwards at Royal Troon – with the same prize claimed at Royal Portrush, as well as five runners-up prizes of Open merchandise.

For fans attending The Open, 'Walk To Win' encourages people to simply download The Open app for free, head to 'Walk To Win', opt in and get moving. People can also take part in the challenge if not at The Open by also entering via the app.

"I've enjoyed being involved with 'Walk To Win' in my role," said Edwards. "Again, at Royal Portrush there were lots of prizes to be won depending on how many steps you did. There aren't many sports where you go and watch and you can do something that's actually good for your health – but you can in golf."

To be in with a chance of winning a round with Edwards, fans had to walk at least 7,381 steps during one Championship or Practice day – the number of yards of the Royal Portrush lay-out for The 153rd Open.

Research suggests that golf spectators walk between five to six miles on average and burn more than 1,000 calories every day

they're on the course. Indeed, playing golf – or simply walking – for just two-and-a-half hours per week improves your wellbeing, productivity and adds years to life.

"Like many people I've got a fitness watch that tells me my steps, my distances, my calories and heart rate," added Edwards. "It's really quite surprising how much of a work-out golf is. But the health benefits of 'Walk To Win' are almost incidental because you're coming to watch one of the greatest sporting events in the world."

To attract new audiences to the sport and increase participation, The R&A continues to engage with stars from sport, stage and screen. Music icon Niall Horan, Hollywood actress Kathryn Newton, football star Gareth Bale and rugby great Bryan Habana are all R&A Global Ambassadors, using their appeal – notably on social media – to broaden the sport's reach.

“It's really quite surprising how much of a work-out golf is. But the health benefits of 'Walk To Win' are almost incidental because you're coming to watch one of the greatest sporting events in the world.”

JONATHAN EDWARDS,
R&A GLOBAL AMBASSADOR

“It was important to discuss how much the golfing world has changed, how much the health side has come into it. It's changed a lot since I was a kid, with proper advice on nutrition, recovery and hydration.”

STEPHEN GALLACHER,
FOUR-TIME DP WORLD
TOUR WINNER

GOLF SPECTATORS WALK
ON AVERAGE BETWEEN 5-6 MILES
AND BURN MORE THAN



CALORIES PER DAY





“ Along with our partner **AIG**, our priority has always been to create an environment that supports these incredible athletes to perform to the best of their ability.

ZOE RIDGWAY,
AIG WOMEN'S OPEN
CHAMPIONSHIP DIRECTOR

OTHER KEY INITIATIVES

AIG Women's Open, LPGA Gold Driver Award for 'Best Player Experience'

In November 2025, the AIG Women's Open received the LPGA Gold Driver Award for 'Best Player Experience' for the second consecutive year – reaffirming its status as one of the most athlete-centred events in world golf.

The award, voted for by LPGA Tour players, recognises the Championship's continued support for athlete performance through the delivery of a high-quality environment.

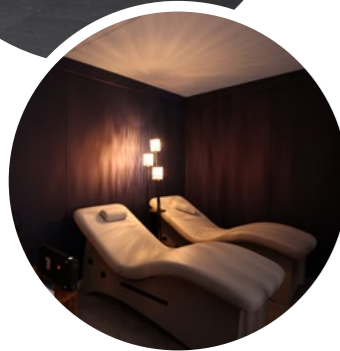
Introduced in 2022, the AIG Women's Open Clubhouse has become a central part of the player experience. The purpose-built space brings together preparation, recovery and personal support services in a single location.

Zoe Ridgway, AIG Women's Open Championship Director at The R&A, said, "Along with our partner AIG, our priority has always been to create an environment that supports these incredible athletes to perform to the best of their ability. We are proud of what the AIG Women's Open now represents on and off the course as we continue to raise the bar for women's golf globally."

The Championship's provision for athlete preparation and recovery continued to develop in 2025 at Royal Porthcawl through enhancements to the Wellness Lounge, training areas and medical facilities. The Wellness Lounge offered a private, quiet environment for post-round decompression, supported by ishga relaxation beds, mindfulness activities and sensory elements designed to aid recovery.

Updated training facilities included a purpose-built gym staffed by a dedicated female strength and conditioning team, complimentary adidas gym kit, a sauna and cold-plunge pool.

The European Tour Performance Institute Health & Performance Truck provided additional physiotherapy and medical support on-site. Free skin screenings were available to players, caddies and staff with annual check records maintained to support early detection of potential concerns.



Player dining menus were designed to support both performance and recovery, with nutritional information provided in English, Japanese, Thai and Korean for the international field.

Professional events

Sports events offer entertainment, but golf events also offer health benefits. While watching most sports involves taking a seat, grabbing some food and a drink and just watching, the average golf fan also gets green space, close to the action and about 11,500 steps on average.

This is enough to comfortably beat over 7,000 daily steps recommended by doctors for health. Some events go further, and help promote health more widely, making a difference to people, to communities and to populations. Examples include:

The 153rd Open at Royal Portrush

- 'Walk To Win' challenge with Jonathan Edwards and entry level options to try golf encouraged all on site to be active.
- Sun protection through the Melanoma Fund and mental health support through Hummingbird available for all.
- The Northern Ireland Government's Public Health team actively promoted golf as a health enhancing physical activity, and collaborated closely with The R&A before, during and after the Championship.

ISPS HANDA Women's Scottish Open at Dundonald Links, 2025

- Free entry was available for anyone cycling to the event, while IMG and NHS Ayrshire and Arran collaborated to promote golf and exercise for health locally.
- A range of health charities and partners provided activations on site, while female athlete health initiatives were available for players.

DP World Tour Championship at Jumeirah Golf Estates, Dubai, 2025

Rory McIlroy expressed his admiration for Dubai's vision to become one of the most active and healthiest cities in the world through the Dubai Fitness Challenge (DFC).

- The DFC was launched in 2017 by His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum with the vision of making Dubai one of the most active cities in the world.
- DFC 2025 invited everyone – residents and visitors alike – to commit to 30 minutes of daily physical activity for 30 days.
- Golf played a central role in the Challenge through the Golf is Good x Dubai Fitness Challenge initiative. It featured step count challenges, physical health and stress checks on site with Mediclinic, as well as activation around Dubai's 30x30 challenge.
- Supported by The R&A and the Emirates Golf Federation, the programme brought more than 100 free golf activities across ten venues throughout November 2025, making the sport accessible to all abilities.

PIF Global Series/ Ladies' European Tour

- Events in China, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States of America consistently promote health with health messaging, step count challenges and activations focused on the female athlete and the health benefits of golf.

Golf Ireland – Samaritans Ireland

In January 2025, Golf Ireland announced a new partnership with Samaritans Ireland, underscoring the governing body's commitment to nurturing the mental and emotional health of the golfing community.

The collaboration helps raise awareness about Samaritans' 24-hour helpline (116 123) and spotlight golf's positive impact on overall wellbeing.

Given golf has more than just physical benefits, golfers can avail of mental health benefits that include reduced stress, improved concentration and meaningful social connections. Golf clubs (a network of 376 affiliated to Golf Ireland) also provide a sense of belonging, offering a welcoming environment and peer support – a natural fit with Samaritans' mission to ensure people have somewhere to turn to and for support when they need it most.



“ Golf is the perfect activity for people looking to stay active – it combines physical movement with mental challenge, gets you outdoors, and can be enjoyed at any age or fitness level.

RORY MCILROY, CAREER GRAND SLAM WINNER

The partnership promotes inclusivity and wellbeing by emphasising golf's ability to unite, while encouraging open discussions around mental health. It also strengthens community bonds through club initiatives and events designed to reduce stigma and empower individuals to seek support.

"We are thrilled to join forces with such an important charity as Samaritans," said Golf Ireland CEO Mark Kennelly. "Golf has always been about more than just the sport, it's about building friendships and taking care of one another. Partnering with Samaritans helps us reinforce that sense of community and ensures anyone who needs help knows where to find it."

For more information, visit samaritans.ie

Golf It!

Golf It!, The R&A's community-based golf and entertainment facility in Glasgow, continues to harness golf's health benefits – physically and mentally – through a number of initiatives.

Through a schools programme, Golf It! has reached over 20,000 children to deliver golf in school. Around 7,000 children have transferred from the schools programme to activities at Golf It!.

A disabled golf programme has close to 1,000 participants, providing opportunities for players with various disabilities to pick up a club. This was supported by the Gerald Micklem Charitable Trust in 2025, through The R&A Foundation. Golf It! also work closely with Golf in Society providing opportunities to those within care homes to use the facility, again supported by The R&A Foundation.

In terms of women and girls' participation, Golf It! boasts an 80% retention rate within a women's only programme, with 38% of their audience being female.

For more information, visit golf-it.com



GOLF IT!
GENERATED A TOTAL
SOCIAL VALUE OF **£20.8M** IN 2025
VERSUS **£17.2M** IN 2024, WITH OVER
£18M IN HEALTH & WELLBEING BENEFITS*

GOLF IT!

RESEARCH.

Social Value Pilot

Golf has the potential to deliver significant benefits to society. Whether golf is improving people's physical and mental health, strengthening communities, or supporting local economies, golf is more than just a sport.

Alongside the growing global interest in the connection between golf and health, there is still more to understand about the full extent of golf's true impact. One such area is social value, which are the additional benefits a community, economy, or environment receives beyond the core aspects of the sport. To investigate this, The R&A is exploring future opportunities to assess and quantify the broader social value that golf generates internationally.

Together with international federations and consultants TTB Sport, The R&A is piloting a study to evaluate the health, wellbeing and economic impacts of golf participation across target countries. This work will apply insights across multiple markets to strengthen advocacy, guide investment, and support future growth strategies.

Most importantly, the pilot will deliver clear, evidence based and globally relevant data (at government level) on golf's societal and community value, providing actionable insights to unlock new public and private investment.

The pilot will also help to communicate golf's ability to positively transform lives and accelerate efforts to encourage more people to play golf, more often. The R&A is committed to delivering over £25 billion in social value over the next five years, in partnership with national federations. This pilot is critical to start to enable measurement for the collective global impact on the sport.



Physical Performance Science for Golf

Since the summer of 2021, The R&A and the European Tour Group have been undertaking a variety of research projects in the over-arching area of Performance Science for Golf led by Dr Chris Bishop.

Specifically, these have ranged from examining what the best physical preparation strategies are for professionals and leading amateurs, to the best proxy measures to quantify physical capacities, to a deeper dive into the biomechanical demands of the golf swing.

The group has successfully published 20 peer-reviewed manuscripts which include narrative reviews, meta-analyses, scoping reviews and empirical investigations.

Projects include:

- To better understand the different recovery methods that should be prioritised for golfers, given their unique lifestyle. For example, doing the simple things well in terms of quality and quantity of sleep and nutrition, while massage, cold plunge, infrared and warm down facilities are all available at leading R&A championships following this work.
- A more recent project has been examining physical, cognitive, physiological and performance differences in golf, between those who walk the course and those who use a golf cart. Walking the course generally has more health benefits and may even be good for your score as an amateur, while professionals playing week-after-week may gain an advantage riding a cart in some circumstances.

There has also been a concerted effort to undertake research specifically in female golfers, given this is a highly under-researched area.

Caddying

Research published in 2023 by researchers from Abertay University and York St John University, in collaboration with Carnoustie Golf Links, reported positive findings in relation to the physical health benefits of caddying – thus highlighting that golf's health benefits go beyond playing.

Participating in caddying duties during the middle of the golf season met the World Health Organization's physical activity (PA) guidelines of between 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity per week, which is similar to previous research in golfers.

On average, caddies exceeded the minimum PA requirement by over 10%. Taking part in caddying activities over a six-month period of the season, which included walking and carrying clubs, helped caddies to meet the guidelines stated above. At the same time, there were several physical health improvements associated with this activity, including:

- Reduced fat mass by 8%, along with 3% decreases in body mass and body mass index (BMI), and a 4% decrease in degree of obesity.
- Total cholesterol decreased by 11%, and coronary heart disease risk scores dropped by 24%.
- Dynamic balance improved by 17%.
- Lower back strength increased by 12%, and lower back muscle quality improved by 13%.

These improvements in body composition, metabolic health, balance and strength through caddying are particularly important. Enhancements in these areas of health could help reduce the risk of heart and circulatory diseases, as well as the risk of falls, particularly amongst middle to older-aged adults.

Caddying offers a sustainable low-intensity, high-volume PA model for many individuals, including current caddies or those wishing to pursue a career in this profession. Participating in caddying duties, through occupational PA, can help promote healthy ageing through the maintenance and improvement of functional ability.

As a result of the positive findings regarding the physical health benefits of caddying, further research is being conducted to understand if these benefits extend to quality of life.

EDGA (European Disabled Golf Association)

A research team at Abertay University, in collaboration with EDGA, is close to completing one of the first studies that focuses on the quality of life of golfers with disabilities. This is a two-part study consisting of a large survey (including over 500 participants from over 25 different countries) on quality of life and in-depth interviews, with a particular focus on the facilitators and barriers to playing golf amongst adults with disabilities.

This study will provide valuable insights into the benefits of golf for people with disabilities, and highlight key themes regarding the facilitators and barriers to participation.

The key findings of this study were presented to several golf federations at the EDGA Algarve Open in November 2025 in Portugal. The aim of this workshop, which was funded by the Leisure Studies Association, was to capture the responses of leaders in the golf community regarding quality of life, as well as facilitators and barriers to participating in the sport. The research and workshop findings from the study will soon be available to view.



YOU ARE MEETING
WHO GLOBAL EXERCISE GUIDELINES
IF YOU PLAY GOLF FOR AT LEAST

150

MINUTES PER WEEK

CASE STUDY 1

Ladies' European Tour Performance Institute

Launched at the AIG Women's Open in 2023, the Ladies' European Tour Performance Institute (LET-PI) was established so LET players could work with experts in sports medicine, strength and conditioning, nutrition, physiotherapy and women's health, giving them the same access to health information, education and support available to elite golfers in the men's game.

In under three years, the institute has delivered significant benefits for LET players.

The institution's initial drive was to establish the fundamental services within health and sport that elite golfers require. Leading practitioners in different health and performance disciplines were brought in to set standards and formalise services, both at LET events and remotely.

The expert team assembled – Philippa Stewart (physiotherapy,) Fiona Scott (strength and conditioning,) Amy O'Donnell (performance nutrition), Dr William Wynter-Bee (mental health and wellbeing), and Dr Danny Glover (sports medicine) – provides wide ranging knowledge and resources for the players.

Underlying everything is research and the institute quickly established more was required in elite women's golf.



Annabel Dimmock

"Between 70 and 80% of health-based research in golf is done just with men, so there's been a big gap there," said LET Chief Medical Officer Dr Danny Glover. "With that in mind, we have launched four major PHD collaborations."

Under the leadership of Dr Andrew Murray, who assists in a medical officer role with a number of golf bodies, those collaborations are focused on strength and conditioning, performance nutrition, breast health and mental health and wellbeing.

Elite players are placing more emphasis on physical preparation and recovery for the demands of the game of golf. Continued education and enhanced support in these areas help LET players to put better strategies in place.

ANNABEL DIMMOCK

"We are gathering crucial information on key metrics that will enable us to improve performance, prevent injury and optimise athletes' overall health," added Dr Glover. "The more data and information we have the better and the more tailored services we can provide the LET athletes."

And an increasing number of LET players are taking advantage of what the institute offers. The physio side has always been popular, but the institute has doubled the offering over the last season with two physios now available at tournaments, together with one soft-tissue therapist. There were more than 4,500 player therapy contacts at LET events in 2025.

Dr Glover says that with more education available, there has been a notable shift in players targeting injury prevention. "We're seeing fewer acute injuries and more focus on maintenance," he said.

And, with player feedback, the institute is developing to meet other health requirements. The institute is providing more consultations on female health as players look to learn more on options around fertility and family planning. There has also been an increase in players seeking advice on mental health and wellbeing.

"We found a larger percentage of players than we thought had dealt with mental health challenges in recent months," said Dr Glover. "So we have focused on that with mental health fitness and quiet zones. At one event, we had a clinical psychologist on site. Sixteen players engaged and feedback was very positive."

The LET-PI is looking to enhance the offering for players and with the support of The R&A Foundation, further projects are planned, including more in-depth clinical research on women's health in golf and a drive to encourage more female health practitioners within the sport.

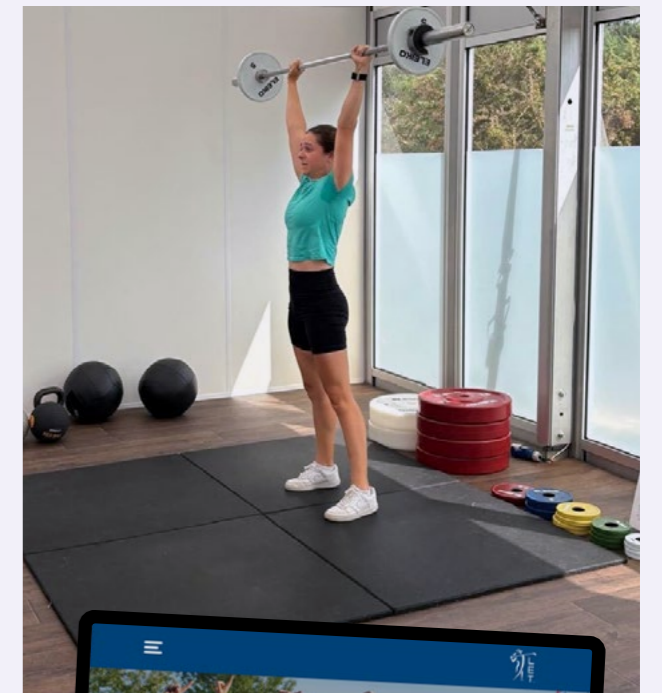
"The R&A has been pivotal in helping us get to this point," says Dr Glover. "They have introduced us to potential partners and given us access to a wider board of experts in a variety of fields."

The LET-PI is setting the standards and creating a template for excellence in health within elite women's golf and sport.



"We are gathering crucial information on key metrics that will enable us to improve performance, prevent injury and optimise athletes' overall health."

DR DANNY GLOVER



For more information, email: tourdoctor@ladieseuropeantour.com

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Dedicated support for female athletes.
- ✓ Helping professional women golfers optimise physical and mental health, enabling them to perform to maximum potential.

CASE STUDY 2

Strength and Balance

A recent research study backed by The R&A has found new evidence to suggest golf may help maintain strength in players aged over 80.

The research builds on previous strength and balance studies in older golfers reported in the 2016-2020 Golf and Health Report from The R&A published in 2020.

The first study on people aged 65-79 has since been peer reviewed and published in scientific literature. The follow-on study on people over 80 years has also been completed and published more recently.*

The World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended guidelines to tackle physical inactivity in older people have several criteria for a sport or activity to fulfil. Research had already shown that playing golf provides sufficient moderate physical activity to benefit cardiovascular fitness, longevity, mental health and wellbeing, with less risk of chronic diseases than being inactive.

It was not known whether golf met the WHO criteria for strength and balance training, hence The R&A-supported studies to explore these two potential benefits in mature golfers.

Research studies

Research led by Professor Maria Stokes OBE and researcher Dr David Wilson, School of Health Sciences at the University of Southampton, involved 152 individuals in two age categories: 65-79 and over 80 years.



*View the published studies at doi.org/10.1123/japa.2021-0498 and doi.org/10.1123/japa.2024-0181

Simple tests were used easily at golf clubs and community centres, including measuring hand grip strength and how many times a person could stand up and sit down in 30 seconds. Other tests were for static balance, standing still on one leg and dynamic balance by reaching a leg in different directions while standing on the other leg.

Golfers aged 65-79 were compared to sedentary non-golfers of the same age. For golfers over 80, it was not possible to collect data from non-golfers to compare with due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so their results were compared with the younger non-golfers.

Findings

- Golfers aged 65-79 were stronger and had better balance than non-golfers.
- Golfers over 80 had similar strength and static balance to younger non-golfers, so hadn't deteriorated as much as you might expect from sedentary non-golfers.
- But dynamic balance wasn't well maintained in those over 80, thus people are encouraged to do other activities to maintain balance (important for walking safely over uneven ground playing golf).



Professor Stokes said, "Our recommendation is to keep enjoying golf in later life but also start early with balance training exercises, for example standing on one leg, standing on a balance mat, trying Tai chi, Pilates or other exercise classes."

Moira Hoath, a public partner supporting the research, said, "The discovery of a mismatch between loss of strength and balance was surprising. Perhaps paying attention to balance as we get older is more important than we thought, especially as falls are such a major problem."

Neil Blackey, another public partner, added, "Golf provides me with a huge boost to my mental state. For example, the social aspects of playing a four-hour round and having a drink afterwards, and the arrangements necessary to make that happen. These are much more than a gym session or an exercise class."

Related work

This exploratory research comparing function between groups of golfers and non-golfers successfully demonstrated that better function was associated with playing golf but did not provide conclusive evidence that differences were due to playing golf.

“ Our recommendation is to keep enjoying golf in later life but also start early with balance training exercises, for example standing on one leg, standing on a balance mat, trying Tai chi, Pilates or other exercise classes. ”

PROFESSOR MARIA STOKES OBE

A preliminary longitudinal study was therefore supported by The R&A, led by Dr George Salem at the University of Southern California, to study novice older golfers.

Professor Stokes added, "Their work indicated improvements in strength and balance after ten weeks of playing golf, suggesting that a large randomised controlled study is warranted comparing golf with other activities to determine the specific physical and psychosocial benefits of golf."



For more information, email:
m.stokes@soton.ac.uk



KEY LEARNINGS (golfers v non golfers)

- ✓ Aged 65-79 yrs – better strength and balance, suggesting golf meets WHO requirements.
- ✓ Over 80 yrs – strength and static balance maintained vs younger non-golfers; dynamic balance not well-maintained.
- ✓ Recommendations for specific balance activities – start well before 80.

CASE STUDY 3

Golf in Society

People who are older, weaker and perhaps diagnosed with a chronic illness can have a healthier, happier life by playing golf. For many in their later years, the physical, mental and social benefits of picking up a club have proved to be as effective as any medicine.

That's why Golf in Society has had such an impact in the community, helping those with everything from dementia and Parkinson's disease to stroke recovery and loneliness.

The company's founder, Anthony Blackburn, hit upon the idea when he saw the uplifting effect golf had on his father in the years before he died of cancer.

In an effort to help others and their families enjoy the same support, Blackburn set about delivering tailor-made sessions at local golf clubs.

Not only has the low-impact exercise helped seniors to remain active, it has kept people socially-engaged and given them a sense of purpose.

"The mental health side of golf is often underplayed," says Blackburn. "Everyone can understand the importance of balance, grip strength and movement. What they don't always see are those moments that bring a smile to the face: a holed putt or a conversation that lights up a great memory.

"The natural surroundings, the fresh air, is wonderful for mental wellbeing. And having a reason to get out of bed in the morning, a bit of hope for the future, is so important."

Golf in Society's sessions are adapted to suit the group they are supporting, but they usually involve a get-together over coffee, a warm-up and perhaps a few tips for those who have never played before. A short competition and prizegiving add to the fun.

It is a successful formula that has proved to be a blessing, not just for those who attend, but for unpaid carers, who appreciate the much-needed respite. "That's the beauty of our programme," explains Blackburn.

"Not only does it give the individual with a long-term health condition the chance to get out and enjoy their favourite thing, it gives carers time to themselves. Just two or three hours to do whatever they want, whether it's shopping, meeting the grandkids or having their hair



done. They can do that, knowing that their loved one is safe and having a good time."

All of which has inspired The R&A Foundation to provide significant funding for the 'Golf at the Heart of Healthy Ageing across Scotland' initiative.

“**The natural surroundings, the fresh air, is wonderful for mental wellbeing. And having a reason to get out of bed in the morning, a bit of hope for the future, is so important.**”

ANTHONY BLACKBURN

The project, a collaboration involving Golf in Society, Scottish Golf, Active Scotland and The R&A, aims to improve the health and wellbeing of older adults and their carers by enabling golf clubs to double as community-based health hubs.

The plan is for ten Scottish clubs, with a little help from local health professionals, to deliver golf-inspired wellbeing programmes and extend their work into the surrounding area.

Golf in Society already takes its sessions into care homes, where there has been an enthusiastic response. Blackburn sees huge potential for it also to be used as preventative medicine or in rehab centres and hospital settings.

"We're determined to make a difference," he says. "My ambition is to have a national network of these venues where people's lives are transformed simply by picking up a golf club."



KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Improving the lives of our ageing population through golf.
- ✓ Putting golf at the heart of local communities, by delivering tailored golf sessions for those living with chronic illnesses like dementia, Parkinson's, loneliness, depression and more.

CASE STUDY 4

AIG Women's Open 2025

The AIG Women's Open in 2025 provided a showcase for how major events can be used as a platform to promote the many health and wellbeing benefits of golf.

Wales, which piloted the 'Golf is Good' campaign in 2022, played host for the first time as Royal Porthcawl set the stage for the largest women's sporting event in the nation's history.

While the world class field provided the entertainment on the course, there were a number of targeted initiatives off it that highlighted the established link between golf and health. Dr Andrew Murray, University of Edinburgh researcher and Medical and Scientific Advisor for The R&A, was thrilled to see how the Championship helped to amplify such an important message.

“What was fantastic about the AIG Women's Open is that the Welsh Government, Wales Golf, The R&A and others pulled together best practice regarding maximising health through golf events and put it in place at the event.”

DR ANDREW MURRAY

“Playing golf helps wellbeing, physical health and even length of life. Our research from the University of Edinburgh also shows that golf spectators not only get to watch world class sport but also gain health benefits through an average of 11,500 steps, green space and social connections, meaning there are many reasons to attend golf events as well as play the sport.”

Spectators at Royal Porthcawl were reminded of the benefits of walking the course, children and families had the chance to try golf and the wider Welsh public became involved through community step challenges and club-based programmes.



Charley Hull greets young fans at the AIG Women's Open at Royal Porthcawl.

During the month of the Championship, more than 92,000 rounds of golf were played at participating clubs in the step challenge in Wales, an 8% increase on the previous year. Notably, participation among girls rose by 22%. “Wales Golf was determined to ensure there is a lasting legacy from hosting the AIG Women's Open,” said Hannah McAllister, Wales Golf CEO.

A staggering 876,235,000 steps were taken by Welsh golfers throughout July, enough to walk around the world more than 17 times.

“Golf is a popular sport for men and women and it's great to see golf's global leadership recognising health priorities and identifying ways golf can be more accessible to more people.”

PROFESSOR FIONA BULL, WHO

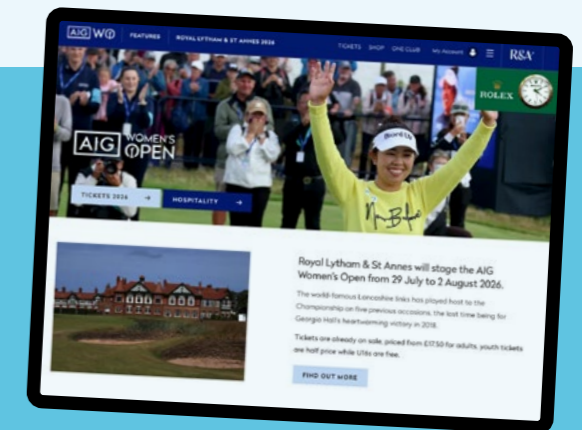
At the same time, The R&A and partners delivered practical on-site measures. CPR training from the British Heart Foundation (bhf.org.uk) was offered to staff and contractors, skin screening and education was made available to players and caddies and best-in-class performance and recovery facilities were provided for competitors, ensuring the Championship lived up to its reputation as a leader in player welfare.



This joined-up vision has also been recognised by global health leaders. Professor Fiona Bull, head of physical activity and programme manager for noncommunicable disease prevention at the World Health Organization (WHO), experienced first-hand how golf can provide accessible pathways into physical activity.

“Golf is a popular sport for men and women and it's great to see golf's global leadership recognising health priorities and identifying ways golf can be more accessible to more people,” she said.

“Thankfully, a six-week come-and-try course showed me how easy it was to enjoy golf as a beginner and how active playing nine holes can be. I'm looking forward to seeing how golf can attract many more girls and women to enjoy the sport and be more active and healthier.”



Find out more at aigwomensopen.com | walesgolf.org



KEY LEARNINGS

- Working with all stakeholders, including Government, to maximise major event platforms to promote golf's health benefits.
- From step count challenges to community activations, the Championship demonstrated how golf can inspire healthier lifestyles – including working with a national federation.

CASE STUDY 5

Fitness focus in the Middle East

Changing perceptions about golf remains one of the key cornerstones in The R&A's on-going drive to make the game more appealing, accessible and accommodating to a wider demographic.

In his role as R&A Development Manager for the Middle East, Central Asia and India, Neal Graham oversees a vast area which continues to enjoy a significant upsurge in participation.

Despite being a fertile ground for expansion, challenges remain. "In the UAE, for instance, we have seen a great rise in participation and the golf ecosystem is strong to the point where we need more courses," explains Graham. "But in this area, 90 per cent of people still wouldn't view golf as a sport."

"On course and off course golf plays a part in getting people involved in the game but one of the key areas of growth is educating people about its health benefits.

"Walking a nine or 18-hole golf course can involve anything from 5,000 to 13,000 steps. Even on a buggy, it can still be 7,800 steps. It's all movement. That helps to mitigate chronic diseases, whether that's colon cancer, cardiovascular problems or type 2 diabetes which unfortunately is very prevalent in the Middle East."



Image: Topgolf Dubai



Aided by the research of Dr Andrew Murray, the Chief Medical and Scientific Officer for the DP World Tour and the Ladies' European Tour, The R&A continues its mission to shape and promote public understanding of golf's benefits for players of all backgrounds, ages and abilities.

Key to this campaign is golf's presence in the Dubai Fitness Challenge (DFC), a month-long initiative celebrating fitness, wellbeing and community.

“On course and off course golf plays a part in getting people involved in the game but one of the key areas of growth is educating people about its health benefits.”

NEAL GRAHAM, THE R&A

Golf is Good x Dubai Fitness Challenge – supported by The R&A and the Emirates Golf Federation – involved more than 100 free golf activities across ten venues in November 2025. It involved increasing awareness of golf's health benefits and holding free activations across multiple venues in Dubai, ranging from beginners' clinics to strength and conditioning sessions to activities at on course and off course facilities, such as Topgolf Dubai.

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Mass participation, organised activity to boost physical, social and mental health.
- ✓ Working with a national federation / within a region for a collective goal and to change the perception of golf.

“Walking a nine or 18-hole golf course can involve anything from 5,000 to 13,000 steps. Even on a buggy, it can still be 7,800 steps. It's all movement.”

NEAL GRAHAM, THE R&A

“This is a way of pushing golf onto a much bigger platform than it's used to,” added Graham of an event which was piloted in 2024 and attracted a record-breaking over three million participants in 2025, who are encouraged to perform 30 minutes of daily exercise over the course of 30 days.

“This is not just about promoting the physical benefits, of course,” noted Graham. “It extends into social benefits in terms of joining clubs, joining communities and societies.

“That in turn helps mental wellbeing. In the day-to-day challenges of everyday life, golf can be seen as a respite. It's important, therefore, that we don't just talk about the fitness benefits. There are wider social and mental benefits as well.”

That statement is backed up by research commissioned by The R&A which shows that golfers live on average five years longer and experience lower risks of loneliness.

“Getting this research out to the public is hugely important,” added Graham, who, pictured left, was also at the forefront of the DFC in 2025. “Through health authorities and the ministries, the national governing bodies for various countries in this area can be supported in their efforts to highlight the wider benefits of golf.

“Those of us involved in the game know that golf is becoming cooler. That's been aided by the rise of social media. Women and girls' fashion is playing a part too. These are all developments which are opening up the sport to a wider audience. Promoting golf's health benefits is another way to break down perceptions.”



For more information, email:
nealgraham@randa.org

CASE STUDY 6

Women's Health

With participation in women's golf growing, supported by the collective efforts of national governing bodies across the world, a focus on key areas of health and fitness to aid performance holds increasing importance.

Cue the work of Lewis Clarke and colleagues. Lewis is a PGA Sports Science Lecturer and is currently involved in a biomechanical research study into breast health and support in golf, working towards a doctorate at the University of Portsmouth. The work began in 2021 and continues to evolve.

“Potentially, in the long term, there could be a golf specific bra for golfers – here is exactly what you should wear and here is exactly what effect it will have on your performance and health.”

LEWIS CLARKE

“We started this project when I was a Masters' student and my supervisor was Professor Jo Wakefield-Scurr,” explains Lewis. “I was working in the golf industry at the time and I was really trying to separate myself as a biomechanist. By trade, I want to analyse human movement and I just wanted to do it in the golf swing, using 3D motion capture and such like.”



“I said to Jo I wanted to do a project in golf biomechanics and she leads the research group on Breast Health at the University of Portsmouth. She loved the idea as they had research from every other sport, from walking to running, horse riding to cycling. They didn't have the golf expertise so Jo nudged me into starting to investigate breast health and bra support in elite golfers. I finished my Masters, did a systematic review and started a professional doctorate, a PhD but in the workplace.”

Recognising the gaps in research specific to golf, Lewis and his team have partnered with the Ladies' European Tour (LET) Performance Institute, Adidas and the Breast Health research group at the University of Portsmouth.



The collaboration involved educational workshops, surveys and professional bra-fitting interventions at three LET events in 2024. The partnership aimed to provide both players and practitioners, such as physiotherapists and strength and conditioning coaches, with the knowledge needed to address breast health.

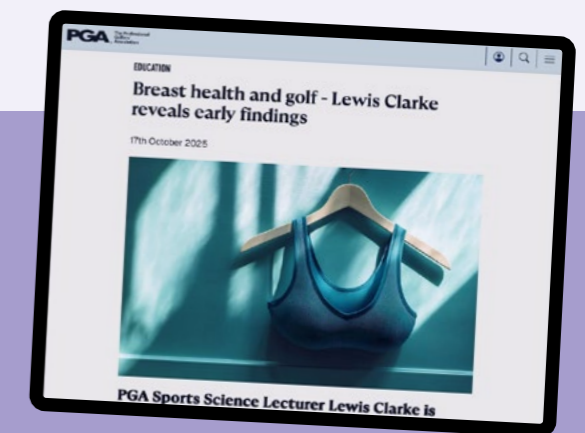
The survey, conducted with over 170 players, revealed three main findings:

- **Awareness gaps**
Female golfers' awareness and understanding of breast health and bra support were significantly lower compared to athletes in other sports. For example, fewer than 20% had previously received education on proper sports bra fitting.
- **Limited sports bra usage**
Many players reported not wearing sports bras, a stark contrast to trends seen in other athletic populations. Players often cited reasons such as discomfort, lack of knowledge and the perception sports bras were unnecessary for golf. Compared to other research groups, such as England's football and rugby teams, who were 90-95% for sports bra usage. The first survey on the LET was around 75%.

- **Perceived impact on technique**
Players noted their breasts and bras influenced set up and backswing, potentially affecting their overall performance.

Lewis continues, “We have closely looked at why people are choosing not to wear a sports bra and what influence it may have on performance. We recently collected data from 26 players, looking at the 3D measurements of their golf swing in motion and we've put them in different bra support conditions to look at differences in outcome.”

“Potentially, in the long term, there could be a golf specific bra for golfers – here is exactly what you should wear and here is exactly what effect it will have on your performance and health.”



Find out more
at pga.info/discover

For more information, email:
lewis.clarke@port.ac.uk

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Familiarisation with the basics of breast health and the importance of proper bra support, thus improving understanding of the physical challenges faced by female golfers.
- ✓ Aim for a clearer idea on the effect of sports bras on movement and potential outcomes.
- ✓ Women's health is a very important, under-researched area and provides an opportunity for golf to do more.

CASE STUDY 7

Nutrition

From the world's best players on the global tours to the weekend campaigners at club level, golf continues to provide plenty of food for thought.

In this sport, you are what you eat. Optimising nutritional intake, and fuelling and re-fuelling correctly before, during and after rounds, can help golfers across the spectrum maximise their potential.

Amy O'Donnell, a recipient of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club Scholarship in 2025, is a performance nutritionist delivering support services for the Ladies' European Tour, the HotelPlanner Tour, The R&A, England Golf and Golf Ireland.

The 28-year-old's expertise has also been utilised by the European team in two Solheim Cups and the Great Britain and Ireland side at the Curtis Cup.

Currently studying a Doctorate in golf and nutrition, O'Donnell helps world-leading educational institutions to advance research into nutrition in both the amateur and professional game.

A keen golfer from a young age, O'Donnell's quest to inform and educate in this particular area was inspired by her own experiences.

"I'd reached a Handicap Index of around three or four, but I hit the wall," she reflected. "I wasn't sure what it was and then I noticed I was feeling the slump around the 14th or 15th hole. I wasn't eating or drinking consistently and my energy and concentration was suffering."

Rather like playing the sport itself, getting the fundamentals of nutrition right can be hugely beneficial.

"Nutrition is still a new and developing area in golf," added O'Donnell. "People can over complicate it at times instead of following some of the basics that we would recommend through our work and research."



"It can be very individual but, on the course, you should be taking on fluid regularly and eating your classic, slow releasing carbohydrates, like oat-based bars, flapjacks or energy balls every four or five holes.

“Topping up consistently throughout the round with good nutritious, fat and protein sources can help with energy, muscle growth and repair.”

AMY O'DONNELL

"Topping up consistently throughout the round with good nutritious, fat and protein sources can help with energy, muscle growth and repair.

"Golf is very unique. It's a low to moderate intensity sport. It's not classified as an endurance sport, but you can be out there for four, five or even six hours. That's where nutrition comes in. There's been a huge change in this area, even from when I was a junior golfer. The support is now there from an early age, and the good habits become engrained.

"Young people, I believe, are more aware of how nutrition, strength and conditioning and recovery can really enhance their game. At the elite level, it's such a competitive environment and players are always looking for that extra one per cent of an advantage."

O'Donnell, meanwhile, continues to give 100% in her ongoing research. "We are trying to lead the way in golf and get more accurate methodologies so we can really nail down the fuelling guidelines for golf," she said.

"Recently, we have been investigating the energy expenditure of golfers and collecting that data. We can translate all that to players and get them to really practice what we are preaching."



For more info, visit golfhealthandperformance.com

KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ How placing a focus on what you eat and drink affects performance.
- ✓ Advancing research into nutrition in both the amateur and professional game through world-leading educational bodies.

CASE STUDY 8

Mental Health

Golf, at a recreational level, has always provided a tranquil, soothing retreat for body and mind.

“It is the perfect sport,” said Dr Margo Mountjoy, a professor and Assistant Dean at McMaster University in Canada and one of the world’s leading authorities in sports science.

“Those who play it benefit from the three components that contribute to good mental wellbeing: physical activity, social activity and spending time in nature.”

In this respect, golf is more than just a game. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, for instance, underlined the value of golf’s mood-lifting, stress-reducing qualities as it provided a welcoming mental and physical sanctuary while other pursuits remained out of bounds amid the stifling restrictions of the time.

Continuing to raise awareness of golf’s myriad health benefits is a major part of the golf industry’s work and mental wellbeing remains an area of considerable exploration.

“Much has been written on the physical benefits of golf for health,” added Mountjoy. “They are real and important. However, the mental health benefits are also real and should be considered as important in health promotional campaigns related to golf.”



At the elite amateur and professional level, meanwhile, the varied and complex demands of golf continue to be brought into sharp focus.

“Mental health studies in golf have recently commenced looking at the magnitude of the problem, as well as some of the particular nuances,” noted Mountjoy. “Until recently, athlete mental health did not receive any attention, as the focus of sport scientists and clinicians was on physical injury prevention and rehabilitation.

“**Those who play golf benefit from the three components that contribute to good mental wellbeing: physical activity, social activity and spending time in nature.**

DR MARGO MOUNTJOY

“A study of amateur women at the World Amateur Team Championships in 2022 revealed that one third (32.5%) reported mental health problems in the four weeks preceding the event. Reported symptoms were of general anxiety, performance anxiety and low mood/depression.”

Continued research allows for a better understanding of the spectrum of conditions and risk factors related to mental health issues in the upper echelons of the amateur and professional game. There is, of course, no one-size-fits-all model.

“A golfer competing on, say, the Legends Tour (over-50s men’s professional circuit) is very different to a young woman on the Ladies’ European Tour,” said Dr William Wynter-Bee, a leading sport and medicine consultant whose expertise is used by numerous golf tours and governing bodies. “It’s a huge area of focus and one which requires different approaches for different groups.”

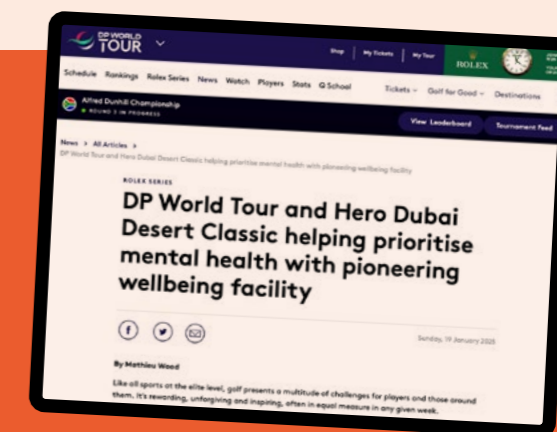
The individual nature of competitive golf brings its own challenges. “It’s a very hard game, mentally,” he added. “As well as the general pressures of being a professional, there are all the stresses of travel and isolation. You are your own boss and, unlike a team sport where you are paid on a contract, you don’t necessarily have the same support network. It can be easy to spiral.

“Reduced performance can be a big mental health risk factor. Towards the end of a season, for instance, we will deal with a lot of calls from players struggling to keep their tour cards.

“Improving educational resources, to reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy across the board, is

a big part of our strategy. This allows players and staff to understand when they are struggling and how to seek help.”

The DP World Tour is actively addressing mental health through partnerships, dedicated on-site facilities, and by encouraging players to speak openly about their struggles. It has partnered with Cognacity to provide psychological support and, at events like the Hero Dubai Desert Classic, it has implemented Mental Fitness and Recovery Zones offering sleep pods, virtual reality stress-reduction programmes and relaxation areas.



Find out more at golfhealthandperformance.com and europeantour.com



KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Mental health support, especially at the top level of golf, holds increasing importance.
- ✓ Research, actions and initiatives are improving the health, safety and wellbeing of players at all levels.

CASE STUDY 9

Collaborations with the IOC on Health and Science

Various sports deliver significant physical and mental health benefits and golf continues to learn from the comprehensive scientific research conducted elsewhere. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has a highly sophisticated medical and scientific programme that not only helps athletes perform at their optimum level and minimise their risk of injury and illness, but also provides research information and education that all sports can benefit from.



The IOC's scientific medical department prepares and delivers medical services for major events such as the Olympic Games. They host knowledge sharing conferences across the globe and provide online resources. The IOC conducts wide ranging research in sports science and health and puts the results into practice. Eleven IOC Research Centres for the prevention of injury and protection of athlete health have been established globally.

The IOC's thorough approach to health and medical science has been a shining example for The R&A.

With guidance from the IOC team and its Senior Medical and Scientific Advisor Professor Roald Bahr, The R&A has been able to deliver world class health and performance facilities at The Open. Players have access to a state-of-the-art gym, as well as experienced practitioners specialising in fitness, recovery, nutrition, physio, strength and conditioning, mental health and medical imaging.

There are similar levels of support at the AIG Women's Open, which was awarded the LPGA Golden Driver in 2024 and 2025 for Player Services. The ISPS HANDA Senior Open and The G4D Open also bring in specialist provision to support older athletes and athletes with a disability, while at The R&A's leading amateur championships players are increasingly making use of bespoke facilities and specialist medical experts.

“Science and medicine keep advancing in sport and it is great the IOC and The R&A deliver such incredible support at events. I have enjoyed seeing this first hand at The Open.”

PROFESSOR ROALD BAHR

“The International Olympic Committee's medical and scientific team have set an incredibly high bar regarding standards of support at events,” says Dr Andrew Murray, Medical and Scientific Advisor to The R&A. “Making use of their education and research programme, we aim to provide the best facilities and services at R&A championships and to advance knowledge on golf science and education, which we are doing with Professor Bahr and the IOC research centres of excellence.”

The R&A makes use of the resources available through the IOC when sharing scientific medical knowledge within golf.

“Our online education for health and scientific practitioners interested in golf has regularly featured IOC scientists,” adds Murray. “And a biennial International Congress on Golf and Health provides a global educational and networking opportunity.”

The collaboration works both ways. Golf features prominently within IOC diplomas and education programmes. Further links are being built with the IOC Research Centres of Excellence.

“Our online education for health and scientific practitioners interested in golf has regularly featured IOC scientists and a biennial International Congress on Golf and Health provides a global educational and networking opportunity.”

DR ANDREW MURRAY

Examples of collaboration include research highlighting the health benefits of golf for spectators, who take an average of 11,500 steps in a day at a championship. This research has been promoted at R&A events and shared as an example of good practice at the World Health Organization's Sport and Health conference.

Secondly, a collaboration exists between the Olympic Games, The Open and the Hero Dubai Desert Classic regarding research and implementation of bespoke mental fitness zones.

“Science and medicine keep advancing in sport and it is great the IOC and The R&A deliver such incredible support at events,” says Professor Roald Bahr. “I have enjoyed seeing this first hand at The Open.”

Sport can inspire collaboration and progress. The close working relationship between the IOC and the world of golf continues to grow.

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Pictured from left to right: A golfer working with a physio on strength and conditioning; relaxation area for players in The Open Clubhouse, a bespoke design that brings player services together under one roof at the Championship; a golfer stretching to boost fitness; spectator health messaging at The Open.



KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ The R&A works with the IOC, establishing best practice at events and sharing research and knowledge on health and science in sport.
- ✓ National federations should foster strong relationships with their National Olympic Committees, Government, national sports bodies and local authorities.

CASE STUDY 10

Beat the Heat

Even in the most extreme heat, golf is a safe and healthy sport to play thanks to guidelines that are now being adopted worldwide. In an effort to mitigate the risks of playing in high temperatures, advisories have been drawn up to ensure that everyone can continue to enjoy golf's many health benefits.

While these were initially aimed at professionals, caddies and event organisers, they are just as important to amateur players and recreational golfers across the globe. With The R&A and the DP World Tour now overseeing golf in some of the world's hottest countries, it is increasingly important the sport adapts to those climates.

Wimpie du Plessis, Chief Medical and Strategic Officer for the Sunshine Tour, first drew up the guidelines in response to extreme heat at the Nedbank Challenge in Sun City in South Africa.

Those recommendations are now being replicated elsewhere, thanks to ongoing discussions with The R&A, other tours and numerous golf federations.



"I'm very encouraged," says du Plessis. "It wasn't a topic for discussion two years ago. Now it is everywhere. It's really rewarding to see how it has been embraced, from The R&A on the social and amateur side to the professional tours. We are constantly in discussion about it."

“**Last year, we had extreme heat conditions at Leopard Creek. We put all these risk-mitigation practices in place and we did not have one single player with a heat-related illness.**”

WIMPIE DU PLESSIS

While most golfers are now aware of the need to protect their skin from exposure to the sun, not so many understand the potential consequences of extreme heat on core body temperature. To limit its effect on performance and to guard against heat-related illness, it is important that golfers and their caddies do everything possible to keep their bodies cool.



At recreational level, that means teeing off earlier in the day, remaining hydrated and wearing appropriate clothing, such as light-coloured shirts and wide-brimmed breathable hats.

In championship golf, where there is no flexibility with tee-times, it means carrying ice towels, taking recommended electrolytes and seeking shade wherever possible. Event organisers have a responsibility to help by making ice readily available, providing cooling areas – especially in those parts of the course where play is held up – and perhaps allowing competitors to wear shorts.

In general, du Plessis hopes that the recommendations lead to more subtle changes at behavioural level. "Golf is not extreme exercise, but players can be out there for five hours," she explains. "And the heat in direct sunshine can be four or five degrees hotter than the published ambient temperature."

"It's important to start changing behaviour. It should become more acceptable to do things like walk under an umbrella when the sun shines. Not just when it rains."

Du Plessis is pleased to report that more research is being done into the impact of extreme temperatures on golfers. She believes the sport is already a step ahead of many others when it comes to beating the heat.

"Last year, we had extreme heat conditions at Leopard Creek (for the Alfred Dunhill Championship)," she added. "We put all these risk-mitigation practices in place and we did not have one single player with a heat-related illness. As it's a moderate-exercise sport, there is an opportunity to keep your core temperature down. By following the correct practices and advisories, it is safe to play."



For more information, email:
wimpied@outlook.com



KEY LEARNINGS

- ✓ Combatting the demands of playing golf in extreme heat with necessary guidelines, for professional and amateur players.
- ✓ Changing behaviours to protect health (eg skin care) with further research planned to assist professional tours and national federations.

THE FUTURE.

Ten years ago, there was insufficient science to prove golf's health benefits, and the general public, doctors and policy makers were generally sceptical.

Now the evidence is clear.

Playing golf is one of the best things you can do for your health, helping with wellbeing, physical health and length of life. Getting a person into golf is one of the best presents you can give.

While there is more research to be documented, the future of golf and health is to ensure the scientific information is in the public domain so the range of health benefits are better understood – helping to add to the over 100 million people (in R&A affiliated markets) playing golf.

It is about resources being created and individuals, facilities, the golf industry and national governing bodies spreading the word, and developing fun and engaging opportunities for people to try and stay in the sport.

It is about engaging groups that currently play less, for example women and girls, those with a disability and providing the environments that are right for them.

It is about promoting health to the millions of spectators that play the sport.

There will be **six areas** of ongoing focus for golf and health in the immediate future:

1) Golf's health benefits

Communicating on a global scale and supporting facilities to help people of all ages, abilities, ethnicities, genders and backgrounds to play and enjoy the sport.

2) Maximising performance

Analysing what can help players be at their best on the golf course eg nutrition, physical preparation and warm up.

3) Illness and injury prevention

Working with the IOC research centres to understand how to decrease injury and illness (eg back, wrist, neck and mental health) to safely return people to the fairways, and to devise optimal rehab eg after hip / knee joint replacements.

4) Women and girls

Looking at issues specific to women and girls to drive increased participation and maximise performance eg active projects look at promoting health benefits, breast health and mental health.

5) Golf for the disabled

Understanding and promoting the health benefits for those with a disability, and supporting measures to increase participation as well as decreasing injury and informing a classification system for future competition.

6) Promoting health at events

Collaborative work to ensure each golf event not only makes positive memories for spectators but makes a contribution to improving health for host communities and countries, while promoting golf for health.

For more information, please visit:

The R&A
randa.org

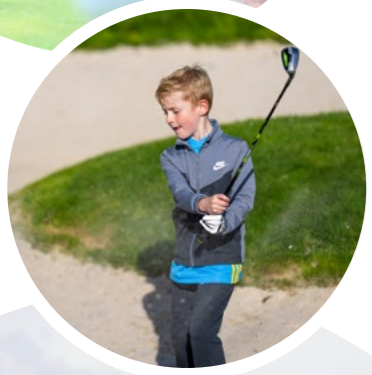
Golf, Health and Performance
golfhealthandperformance.com

The Golf & Health Project
golfandhealth.org

References

For details of references for specific research studies and digital infographics, email: docandrewmurray@gmail.com

The Golf & Health Project wish to acknowledge the expertise and work of Dr Roger Hawkes, consultant in sport and exercise medicine, for leading and driving the initial phase (2016-2020) of the Project.



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It is amazing how much progress has been made over the last decade within golf and health. The benefits of golf for health are now very much part of the sport's narrative on a global scale, educating golfers and encouraging new people into golf, as well as providing compelling evidence to policy makers.

Personally, I love the unique challenge of golf and the competitive aspect, but I also enjoy the social side and reaping those physical and mental health benefits. What better way to spend an afternoon than in the open air with friends and family playing a fantastic sport.

As we embark on a new long-term strategy at The R&A, we look forward to working with the golf industry and national governing bodies to continue the momentum across golf and health.

MARK DARBON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE R&A

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R&A

The R&A group of companies was formed in 2004 to take on The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews' responsibilities for governing the Rules of Golf, staging The Open, golf's original championship, and developing the sport. The R&A World Golf Museum in St Andrews is part of The R&A group.

Together The R&A and the USGA govern the sport of golf worldwide, operating in separate jurisdictions with a commitment to a single code for the Rules of Golf, Rules of Amateur Status and Equipment Standards. The R&A, through R&A Rules Ltd, governs the sport worldwide, outside of the United States and Mexico, on behalf of over 108 million golfers in 149 countries and with the consent of 169 organisations from amateur and professional golf.

The R&A has responsibility for running a series of world class amateur events and international matches in women's and girls' as well as men's and boys' golf. The R&A stages The Open, the AIG Women's Open and works with the DP World Tour to stage the ISPS HANDA Senior Open.

The R&A is committed to investing £200 million over ten years in developing golf and supports the growth of the sport internationally, including the development and management of sustainable golf facilities. For more information, visit www.randa.org

THE
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