The Challenge
There is no shortage of articles written about aspects of golf. After all, the game is one of the world’s oldest and most popular sports, with an estimated 55 million people playing it worldwide. But it may be surprising that relatively little is written about what is perhaps the most obvious aspect of the sport; its impact on health. By collating information from various sources, a team of researchers at The University of Edinburgh set out to discover more about this relationship.

The Research
The team gathered sources of information and evidence which included a computer-based search that incorporated data from published and unpublished reports of any age or language, identified by searching electronic databases, platforms, reference lists, websites and from consulting experts.

The search provided just under 5,000 initial results, from 24 countries and in nine languages. An assessment process led to just 301 publications meeting the team’s criteria which they then studied in more detail.

The Results
The evidence that the team gathered showed that golf can provide moderate intensity physical activity and is associated with physical health benefits to the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, as well as improving overall well-being. It also showed that the frequency of golfing injury is moderate. Back injuries are the most common and accidental head injuries are rare, but can have serious consequences.

The study showed that there is limited evidence related to golf and mental health.

The Impact
The project’s findings were published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* in October 2016. The findings encourage practitioners and policymakers to support more people to play golf, due to the associated improvements in physical health and well-being.

Sport, such as golf, that requires relatively moderate levels of fitness and exertion can play a significant role in mainlining a healthy lifestyle. Unlike many other sports, golfers frequently continue the sport well into middle age. This study has increased awareness of the importance of physical activity to our health and has shown that playing sports like golf can potentially contribute to increased life expectancy.

The project has paved the way for a more comprehensive study, looking at specific issues such as golf’s effect on muscle-strengthening, balance improvement and mental health.

To find out more about the links between golf and health visit [www.golfandhealth.org](http://www.golfandhealth.org)

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