

Golf, Health and Performance: Hidden Relationships

[Neil E. Wolkodoff, PhD](#)

Golf is fun, is there an intersection of golf fun and improved health?

Does playing golf improve golf-specific performance?

Can you train outside of golf so health, fitness and golf performance improve?

What Golf Does

- Burns calories in an extended time frame, which relates positively to health.
- Provides a social context for significant interaction and increased mental health.
- Improves various aspects of cognitive and brain function from short-term memory to higher-level logic.

What Golf Does Not

- Significantly improve aerobic fitness beyond a baseline level.
- Improve muscle strength either in upper or lower body.
- Provide more than minor improvements in weight and body composition.

The Relationship

- *Golf is an activity/sport that uses fitness for better performance yet does not develop fitness.*
- Golf is not at the threshold where positive endurance ability changes occur (heart rate is not high enough!).
- Golf does not impact your strength levels as the intensity is too low even though the movement is repeated.
- While you might lose a few pounds walking the course twice per week, the most crucial health metric is body composition, or the ratio of lean tissue to fat, that has minimal improvement.

Upgrade Health Effects/Golf Performance

- Train aerobically with distance exercise, once per week outside of golf, example upright cycling for 40-50 minutes at moderate pace/intensity.
- Improve your Anaerobic Threshold or sprint endurance by either group cycling or your own interval program once per week for 30-45 minutes, alternate intervals of 60 seconds with recoveries of 60 seconds.
- Hit it farther and more consistently using strength training once or twice per week, a whole-body program of three sets of 10 repetitions as a starting point.
- Walk the course to add to your calorie total for the week, improving health.
- Using any walking mode will result in a slight bump in mental focus therefore improving score if aerobic fitness level is at least moderate.