

## **The Benefit of Golf to Mental Health and Well-being**

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Imagine a therapy that had no known side effects, was readily available, and could improve your psychological functioning and well-being at zero cost. Well imagine no more as playing golf could be such a therapy and here is why. A round of golf involves the following therapeutic ingredients- exercise, time in nature, the fostering of new and prolonging of existing relationships, recreation, relaxation and stress management. These ingredients have become known as TLCs or Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes and considerable evidence now points to their effectiveness in both clinical and normal populations. In fact, TLCs are sometimes as or more effective as either psychotherapy or medication!

Playing a round of golf will take approximately four hours and circa 18,000 steps. Being physically active for 30 minutes and over offer serious psychological and physical benefits. For example, following an exercise session of 30 minutes or more we can see a reduction or amelioration in the risk of developing depression, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or anxiety disorders. We also see significant reductions in age-related memory loss. Indeed we even see important gains around cognitive functions such as processing speed, planning, coordination and working memory. Exercise even increases brain volume and blood flow, self-esteem, enhances sleep and mood and reduces negative thoughts and rumination. Essentially our brains are better regulated and function at a higher level post exercise. Everyone seems to benefit, both, young and old, clinical and nonclinical and women look to gain more than men.

Playing golf and being in natural settings has been shown to enhance cognitive, attentional, emotional, spiritual and subjective well-being. The added bonus of this is the social element of playing golf. Developing and maintaining relationships enhances happiness, quality of life, resilience and even wisdom! Mental health care professionals often target enhancing the number and quality of individuals' relationships and golf is the ideal sport to foster and develop such quality relationships.

Finally, golf is a challenging sport requiring extensive decision-making, planning and executing precise skilled movements. Playing such a wonderful sport entails learning to develop effective self-management skills which can foster greater emotional stability and psychological maturity, both of which are key ingredients of well-being both on and off the golf course.

Based on the above information I hope you have a new sense of the layers of benefits that can be gained from playing golf. For me it certainly seems to bring new meaning to the term- Happy golfing!

For more on this and a summary of the evidence please see the following link & excellent summary of TLC research by Prof Roger Walsh <https://apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-66-7-579.pdf>

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