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News Release

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Better health is par for the course for golf fans, study shows

Golf fans may be among the fittest of all sporting spectators, a new study suggests.

Most people who attend golf events exceed recommended daily step counts, researchers found.

A survey of spectators at last year's Paul Lawrie Match Play event at Archerfield Links, East Lothian, found that they averaged about 11,500 steps per day.

Male spectators took about 1800 more steps each day than women, according to pedometer data, the study found.

Of those surveyed, 60 per cent said they would like to be more physically active.

The study, published ahead of this week's Ricoh Women's British Open at Kingsbarns, is the first to use step-count data to assess golf spectators' physical activity.

Health and golf bodies may wish to further promote the benefits of spectating, researchers from the University of Edinburgh suggest.

Their findings could encourage a wider audience to enjoy the health benefits of golf spectating, researchers say.

Researchers and policy-makers agree that regular physical activity can improve mental health, physical health and life expectancy for people of all ages and backgrounds.

More than 10 million people spectate at golf tournaments each year, with the opportunity to improve their health while watching their sporting heroes.

The survey also found that spectators rate exercise and physical activity as important reasons for attending golf tournaments.

Fans also say attending events allows them to enjoy being in the fresh air, spending time with friends and family and watching star players.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Golf playing and spectating is particularly popular in middle aged and older adults in North America, Europe and Asia. This demographic typically has lower levels of physical activity compared with younger adults and children.

Anecdotal evidence found that spectators at the 2014 Ryder Cup at Gleneagles collectively walked a distance equal to four times around the world. Fans at China's Shenzhen International in 2016 walked the equivalent length of the Great Wall seven times.

The health benefits for spectators at tournaments may vary depending on weather conditions, culture, types of tournament and golf course terrain.

The study, published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, and BMJ Open Sports and Exercise Medicine is part of the Golf & Health Project, which is led by the World Golf Foundation. The initiative aims to increase the understanding of golf in health and wellbeing.

Researcher Dr Andrew Murray, from the Physical Activity for Health Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh, urges those who promote the sport to emphasise the physical benefits of golf spectating. He said: "Walking is one of the best things you can do for your health, adding years to life, and increasing health and happiness. These pilot findings show that golf spectators can gain physical activity which could benefit their health- while watching top quality sport at close quarters."

Paul Dunstan, Championship Director for the Paul Lawrie Match Play event and Ryder Cup Operations Director at the European Tour said, "It is great to hear that the work we are doing to promote active spectating at events like the Ryder Cup, the Shenzhen International and the Paul Lawrie Match Play is being backed up by this research."

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