

*GWASANAETHAU IECHYD A DIOGELWCH - HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICES*

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**A REVIEW OF DISCOMFORT FOUND AMONGST GOLFERS WHO RESPONDED  
TO A HEALTH SURVEY IN DECEMBER 2009**

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Gwasanaethau Iechyd a Diogelwch – Health and Safety Services, Penbre, Lon y Coleg. LL57 2DG Tel: 01248 3847

Ebost: [lechyddiogelwch@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:lechyddiogelwch@bangor.ac.uk) Email: [healthandsafety@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@bangor.ac.uk) Fax: 38-3259

[www.hss.bangor.ac.uk](http://www.hss.bangor.ac.uk)

## GWASANAETHAU IECHYD A DIOGELWCH - HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICES

### HEALTH AND GOLF

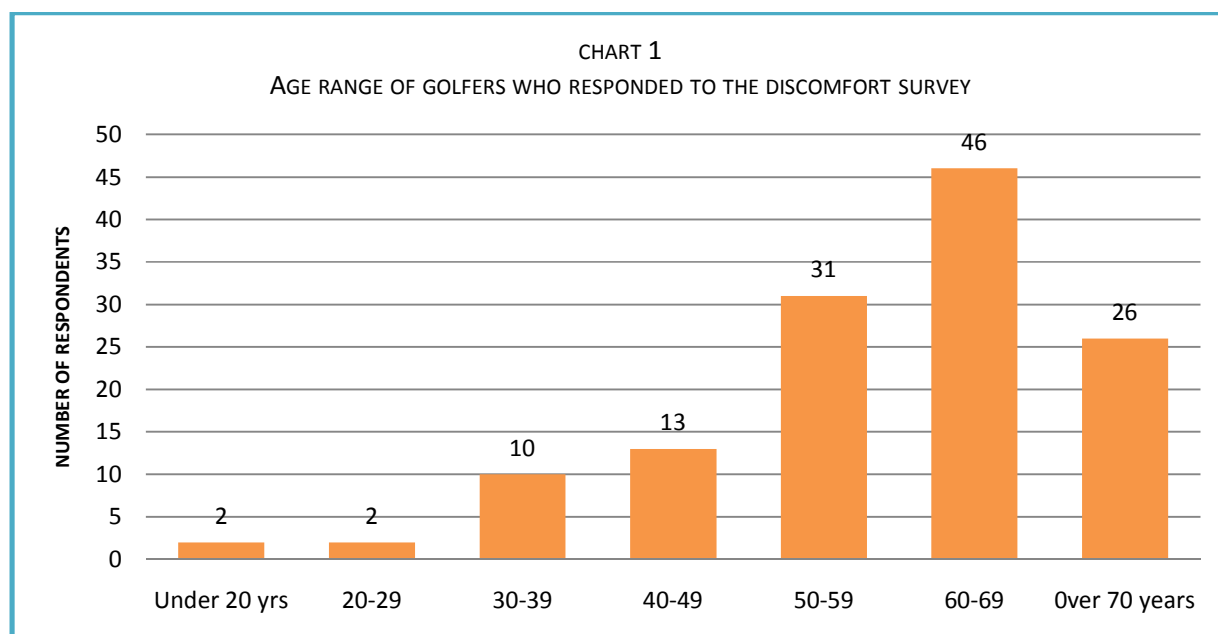
The link between golf and bad health has been the subject of many articles. Walking around a golf course can be 5 or more miles in extreme weather and playing conditions that can expose us to hazards ranging from hypothermia, heat stroke, lightning bolts, injury from stray balls, grumpy competitors and golf cart collisions.

Over the past year our risks to health have been in the media. Newspapers and television report some very nasty playing illnesses with a pandemic of the 'white cold 'Humphries'', repetitive waggle syndrome, golf flu and the cranks<sup>1</sup>. To make matters worse, just when we think it is safe to address the ball we are warned that ear plugs should be worn to prevent hearing damage from the noise caused by titanium drivers<sup>2</sup>.

To answer whether or not golf is actually bad for health, a cross selection of golf clubs in Wales have been approached to ask their members how they were, their age and if they thought golf had either caused or aggravated any pre-existing physical discomfort<sup>3</sup>.

### THE FINDINGS

130 golfers responded (68 from Abergele, 34 from Conwy, 22 from Southerndown and 6 from other areas in Wales). Of this number 104 were men and 26 were women. The average age of golfers who responded were in the 60-69 year age group (Chart 1). It is not known whether this dispersion of ages or the gender mix is representative of all golf club members.



The respondents were asked whether they had experienced discomfort in the last 12 months affecting the neck, shoulders, upper back, elbows, wrist or hands, lower back, hips, knees or ankles and feet. This

<sup>1</sup> THE TELEGRAPH (2010) *The diseases of the golfer - a helpful guide* [www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/golf](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/golf)

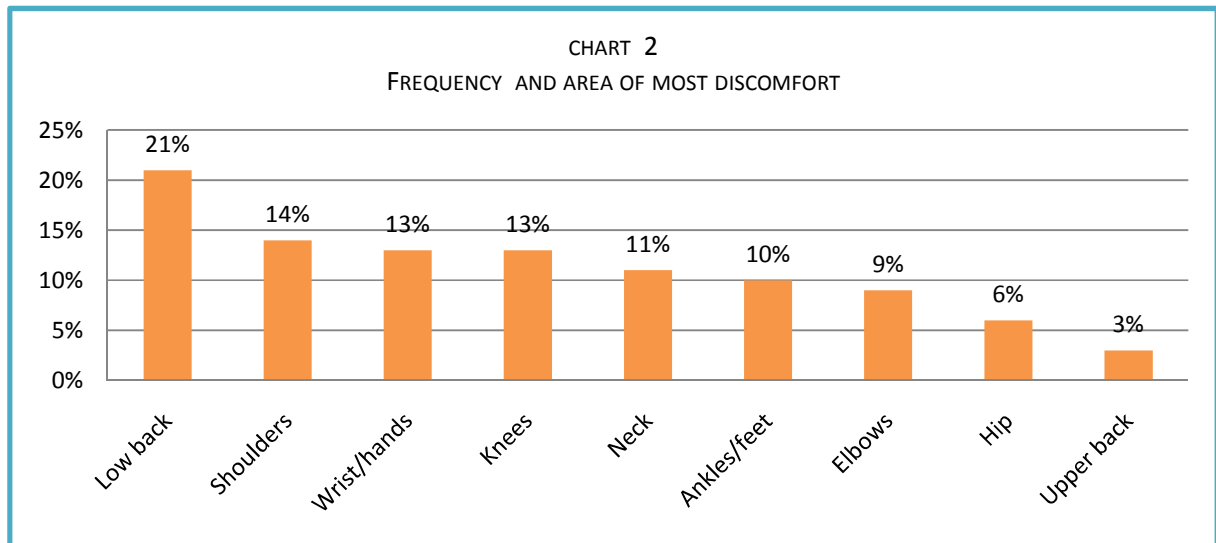
<sup>2</sup> BBC (2010) 'Playing golf can damage hearing' [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> PATTON, J (2009) 'Golfers discomfort survey' [www.surveymonkey.com/s/TGNZ9YX](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TGNZ9YX)

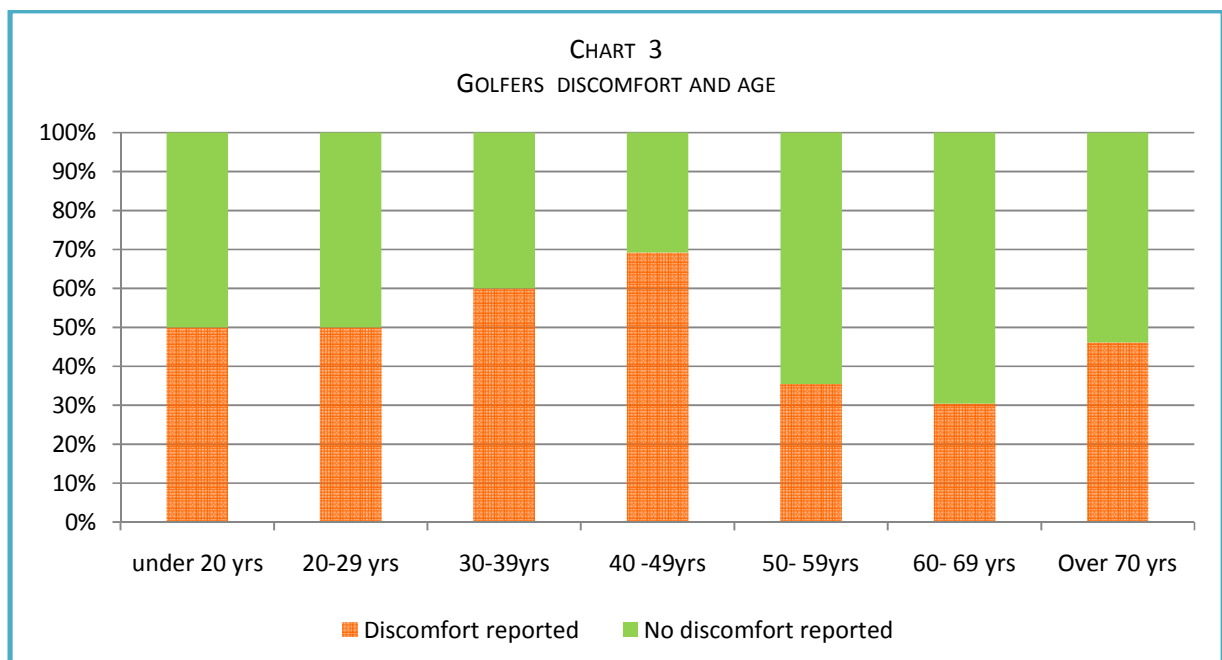


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enabled the frequency of discomfort affecting specific areas of the body to be identified (Chart 2).



The total number of golfers saying they had experienced discomfort in the past year totalled 54 (42% of players). Although most reports of discomfort came from people over the age of 50, this was the age banding of most respondents. Of greater interest, the percentage of players in discomfort under the age of 50 was found to match or even outnumber those in comfort for that age range (Chart 3).



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The survey asked those who had been in discomfort over the past year whether they felt the condition had been caused or made worse by playing golf. In talking to golfers, most playing related problems are said to be triggered by bad weather, bad food or bad company!

80% of those who had experienced discomfort replied to say their health problems had *not* been caused by golf. They then confirmed that playing golf was aggravating pre-existing health problems.

When playing related discomfort had been detected the areas of the body most affected were reported to be the same as those whose discomfort had not been caused by golf; the low back, shoulders, wrists, hands and knees.

### ADVICE

Golf is good for health and a fun way of exercising – the benefits of which keep joints and muscles in good condition. Whether or not your discomfort is caused by playing golf, the challenge is to be free of pain and enjoy your game.

When discomfort is caused solely by playing, seek advice from your golf professional. To protect your future health a better playing technique is essential.

To help those in discomfort due to non-playing medical reasons, diagnosis and treatment by GPs is the first step to take. The next is to check with your GP whether joining a fitness for golf programme will help or hinder recovery. Finally, adjust your playing technique to maximise your playing ability.

Joe Patton  
Bangor University  
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