

# The Back Nine

A column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

John McLoughlin, Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Grange Park Golf Club, explains why he believes greenkeeping is ideal for your health and longevity

**Poor wages, unsociable hours, difficult golf club committees and being undervalued are just a few of the complaints from the average greenkeeper.**

But really, is it all that bad? Having studied health, nutrition and wellbeing for the last five years, I've realised I may well have chosen the best career possible for superior wellbeing. In fact I'm finding it very difficult to think of an industry that offers such a positive impact on our health and longevity.

Firstly, Vitamin D is very important for good health, strong bones and growth, but unfortunately a high percentage of adults in Western Europe are Vitamin D deficient.

Vitamin D is mainly made in the skin by sunlight. The whole nature of greenkeeping - being outside - gives us every chance of getting the required amount of Vitamin D through sunlight. Also, with many golf courses being in remote locations, the quality of air that the average greenkeeper breathes in on a daily basis is far less polluted and of greater purity compared to anyone working indoors for a living.

The benefits of this are often completely overlooked. In a confirmation of what many doctors and researchers have suspected for years, a recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health and Brigham Young University has shown that decreasing air pollution extends people's lifespans by an average of five months.

The lifestyle of a greenkeeper often involves very early morning starts which also leads to early bed times. Benjamin Franklin once said, "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise".

The sleep pattern of the modern greenkeeper is very much in tune with the body's natural 'circadian rhythm' or 'body clock.' The human body works according to a natural 24 hour sleep-wake cycle which

controls body temperature, sleep/wake timing, and the way our organs work.

Past research has shown that the body functions at its optimum when it is aligned with the natural sleep and wake pattern. The most beneficial sleep pattern is around the natural rhythm of daily and seasonal light/dark cycles. Positive effects include greater alertness, improved immune defences and better decision making.

The body carries out its important cell growth and repair in the first four hours of sleep, from approximately 10.30pm-2.30am. A high percentage of greenkeepers are generally in bed early meaning they benefit from positive cell growth and repair.

Also, walking is one of the greatest activities for keeping healthy. Regular walks can dramatically reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma and some cancers.

Walking is also fantastic for increasing bone density, muscle elasticity and helping with mind clarity. The greenkeeper has plenty of opportunities throughout their working day to do plenty of walking therefore positively impacting their health and fitness.

Regular starting times and breaks allow you to control your nutritional input throughout the day. This helps keep your blood sugar levels steady and minimise feelings of tiredness, dizziness and irritability. It also maintains a steady metabolism, which is how your body creates and uses the energy from food - and the golf course itself can be a great source of nutrient rich foods as foraging becomes increasingly popular.

I am also aware that the career path you choose often dramatically influences your possible life expectancy.

Recent research has shown that men in professional occupations



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## about the author



John McLoughlin is Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Grange Park Golf Club, St Helens. He has travelled extensively around the world and is proud to have worked at first class golf venues including The Gleneagles Resort, Royal Melbourne Golf Club and The Riviera Country Club. John has also worked on over 100 worldwide golf tournaments representing the European Tour and Ladies European Tour as a golf tournament official managing the scoring.

can expect to live up to 80, almost eight years longer than those in unskilled jobs, whose life expectancy is 72.7.

If you have autonomy and control over what you do, you tend to be in better health. I suspect very little research has been carried out regarding the life expectancy of a greenkeeper although I'm confident it would fare very well against other industries.

Another unique characteristic is the willingness of other turf professionals, often in direct competition, to share important knowledge, time and resources. I don't know of any other profession which acts in such a dignified way and I feel honoured to be part of it, and the health benefits are another bonus. My glass is very much half full and I feel the grass is most definitely greener on our side.

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International