

RESEARCH

Keep On Golfin’

Activity – almost any activity –
may be the key to aging gracefully

The first baby boomers will reach retirement-at-60 this year, making kinesiology & health science Professor Joe Baker’s research all the more timely – he is looking at what it takes to age successfully. “Demographics indicate a remarkable aging trend in North America,” says Baker. By 2026, for instance, the number of adults aged 65 and over will roughly double. “So we need to better understand the aging process,” Baker says. “My research investigates whether ongoing physical activity can promote healthier, more successful aging.”

To track how physical ability declines over a lifetime, Baker, who is based in York’s new Faculty of Health, came up with the novel idea to study 96 professional golfers, collecting data on scoring averages, driving distance, driving accuracy, putts per round etc. What he found was a decline in golf performance as the pros aged, but also that a high level of performance could be maintained with regular activity (as opposed to power sports such as sprinting where performance is biologically constrained).

“Our research tells us that it’s important to keep active,” says Baker. “Any activity is good activity even if it’s walking to the store. While it’s true there is consistent evidence indicating physical and cognitive abilities decline with age, there’s contradictory evidence as to whether it is actually due to age. Inactivity may have much more to do with any decline.”

Baker’s results also suggest that activities where performance is largely determined by cognitive and motor efficiency (chess, golf and tennis) may be more resistant to age-related decline. ■