

Why Play Tennis?

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We've all heard tennis referred to as the "sport for a lifetime."
But, is this really true?

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According to world-renowned scientists from a variety of disciplines, there is no doubt that tennis can improve your overall health, including your mental and physical fitness.

Here are the facts:

- People who participate in tennis three hours per week at a moderately vigorous intensity cut in half their risk of death from any cause, according to the late Dr. Ralph Paffenbarger, who was an internationally recognized exercise authority and studied more than 10,000 people for 20 years.
- Tennis players scored higher in vigor, optimism and self-esteem while scoring lower in depression, anger, confusion, anxiety and tension than other athletes and non-athletes, according to Dr. Joan Finn and colleagues at Southern Connecticut State University.
- Since tennis requires alertness and tactical thinking, it may generate new connections between nerves in the brain and promote a lifetime of continuing development of the brain, reported scientists at the University of Illinois.
- Tennis outperforms golf and most other sports in developing positive personality characteristics, according to Dr. Jim Gavin, author of "The Exercise Habit."
- Competitive tennis burns more calories than aerobics or cycling, according to studies in caloric expenditures.

With these facts in mind, review the 34 specific reasons why you should consider playing regularly!

Physical reasons to play tennis

Tennis enhances your:

1. Aerobic fitness by burning fat and improving your cardiovascular fitness and maintaining higher energy levels.
2. Anaerobic fitness by offering short, intense bursts of activity during a point followed by rest, which helps muscles use oxygen efficiently.
3. Ability to accelerate by providing practice in sprinting, jumping and lunging quickly.
4. Powerful first step by requiring anticipation, quick reaction time and explosion into action.
5. Speed through a series of side-to-side and up and back sprints to chase the ball.
6. Leg strength through hundreds of starts and stops that build stronger leg muscles.
7. General body coordination since you have to move into position and then adjust your upper body to hit the ball successfully.
8. Gross motor control through movement and ball-striking skills that require control of your large muscle groups.

9. Fine motor control by use of touch shots like angled volleys, drop shots and lobs.
10. Agility by forcing you to change direction as many as five times in 10 seconds during a typical point.
11. Dynamic balance through hundreds of starts, stops, changes of direction and hitting on the run.
12. Cross-training through a physically demanding sport that's fun for athletes who specialize in other sports.
13. Bone strength and density by strengthening bones of young players and helping prevent osteoporosis in older ones.
14. Immune system through its conditioning effects, which promote overall health, fitness and resistance to disease.
15. Nutritional habits by eating appropriately before competition to enhance energy production and after competition to practice proper recovery methods.
16. Hand-eye coordination because you constantly judge the timing between the oncoming ball and the proper contact point.
17. Flexibility due to the constant stretching and maneuvering to return the ball to your opponent.

Psychological reasons to play tennis

Tennis helps you:

18. Develop a work ethic because improvement through lessons or practice reinforces the value of hard work.
19. Develop discipline since you learn to work on your skills in practice and control the pace of play in competition.
20. Manage mistakes by learning to play within your abilities, and realizing that managing and minimizing mistakes in tennis or life is critical.
21. Learn to compete one-on-one because the ability to do battle on court trains you in the ups and downs of a competitive world.
22. Accept responsibility by practicing skills and checking your equipment before a match, and by making accurate line calls during a match.
23. Manage adversity by learning to adjust to the elements (e.g. wind, sun) and still be able to compete tenaciously.
24. Control stress effectively because the physical, mental and emotional stress of tennis will force you to increase your capacity for dealing with stress.
25. Learn how to recover by adapting to the stress of a point and the recovery period between points, which is similar to the stress and recovery cycles in life.
26. Plan and implement strategies since you naturally learn how to anticipate your opponent's moves and plan your countermoves.
27. Learn to solve problems since tennis is a sport based on angles, geometry and physics.
28. Develop performance rituals before serving or returning to control your rhythm of play and deal with pressure. These skills can transfer to taking exams, conducting a meeting or making an important sales presentation.
29. Learn sportsmanship since tennis teaches you to compete fairly with opponents.
30. Learn to win graciously and lose with honor. Gloating after a win or making excuses after a loss doesn't work in tennis or in life.

31. Learn teamwork since successful doubles play depends on you and your partner's ability to communicate and play as a cohesive unit.

32. Develop social skills through interaction and communication before a match, while changing sides on the court and after play.

33. Have fun - because the healthy feelings of enjoyment, competitiveness and physical challenge are inherent in the sport.

Summary and reason No. 34

Is it any wonder that scientists and physicians around the world view tennis as the most healthful activity in which you can participate? While other sports can provide excellent health benefits and some can promote mental and emotional growth, none can compete with tennis in delivering overall physical, mental and emotional gains to those who play.

All these benefits make tennis the ideal sport for kids to learn early in life. What parent wouldn't want their children to have these advantages through their growing years?

And, it's never too late for adults of all ages to take up the game. The human system can be trained and improved at any stage of life. The key is to start playing now to get the most out of these benefits throughout your lifetime.

And, that brings us to reason No. 34: Tennis is truly the sport for a lifetime! The proof is in the playing.