

Health Benefits of Tennis: Why Play Tennis?

By Jack L. Groppel, Ph.D.

Its historic phrase has been the “sport for a lifetime.” But is this really true? According to world-renowned scientists from a variety of disciplines, there is no doubt that tennis is one of the best sports for you to play.

Here are the facts:

- People who participate in tennis 3 hours per week (at moderately vigorous intensity) cut their **risk of death in half from any cause**, according to physician Ralph Paffenbarger who studied over 10,000 people over a period of 20 years.
- Competitive tennis **burns more calories** than aerobics, inline skating, or cycling, according to studies on caloric expenditures.
- 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 thus promote a lifetime of continuing development of the brain, reported scientists at the University of Illinois.
- Tennis outperforms golf, inline skating and most other sports in developing **positive personality characteristics**, according to Dr. Jim Gavin, author of The Exercise Habit.

With these results in mind, let's take a look at 34 specific reasons why you should consider playing tennis regularly!

Physical Reasons to Play Tennis



Tennis helps 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 practice in sprinting, jumping and lunging to move 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 which 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 court movement and ball-striking skills which require control of your large muscle groups.
9. **fine motor control** by the use of touch shots like angled volleys, drop shots and lobs.
10. **agility** by forcing you to change direction as many as 5 times in 10 seconds during a typical tennis point.
11. **dynamic balance** through hundreds of starts, stops, changes of direction and hitting on the run.
12. **cross-training** by offering a physically demanding sport that's fun to play for athletes who are expert 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. **eye-hand coordination** because you constantly judge the timing between the on-coming ball and the proper contact point.
- 17. **flexibility** due to the constant stretching and maneuvering to return the ball toward 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 compete and fight trains you in the ups and downs of a competitive world.
- 22. **accept responsibility** because only you can prepare to compete by practicing skills, checking your equipment and during match play by making line calls.
- 23. **manage adversity** by learning to adjust to the elements (e.g. wind, sun) and still be able to compete tenaciously.
- 24. **accommodate 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 an 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 of 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 #34



Is it any wonder that scientists and physicians around the world view tennis as the most healthful activity in which you can participate? There may be other sports that can provide excellent health benefits and some which can provide mental and emotional growth. But no sport other than tennis has ever been acclaimed from all disciplines as one that develops great benefits physically, mentally and emotionally.

Tennis is a sport for kids to learn early in life. What parent wouldn't want their children to get these benefits through their growing years?

It's not too late for adults and seniors too! The human system can be trained and improved at any stage of life.

Here's the key... you must begin playing tennis now to get these benefits throughout your lifetime. And that brings us to reason #34:

Tennis is truly the sport for a lifetime! It's been proven.