

YOUR PERSONAL TRAINER

Our regular health and fitness column with **Mike Searle**

Anyone for Tennis?



In just a few days we will see football competing with tennis for back page news coverage as the world's greatest tennis tournament takes place over the next fortnight at Queens Club, Wimbledon. Tennis is extremely popular in the UK, with an estimated three million players and 35,000 indoor and outdoor courts. With the success of Tim Henman and more recently Andy Murray it has been popularised further. Of course we can't all be world ranked international tennis stars like Tim and Andy but tennis is an excellent fitness activity as well as being a great game to play. A few of our Personal Training Clients have requested specific conditioning for tennis, so this week I am focusing on tennis health and fitness benefits together with some key training tips.

Tennis Health and Fitness Benefits

- 1. All over body conditioning.** A game of tennis requires all over body strength, employing the muscles of the legs, back, shoulders, arms and abdominals; so a couple of sets will work many muscle groups. However, tennis is a biased activity because you use predominantly one side of the body and many famous players including Pat Cash, Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski suffer from back problems because of the muscle imbalances that build up. The solution is to keep the body aligned by focusing on maintaining strength on the opposite side to your racquet arm by doing specific gymnasium exercises.
- 2. Improved coordination.** Good coordination makes your movements efficient and every task easier and tennis is an excellent way of honing your gross motor skills by utilising large muscle groups like the legs and your fine motor skills with touch shots such as volleys and lobs.
- 3. Reduced osteoporosis risk.** The National Osteoporosis Society recommends tennis as a fitness activity because it not only strengthens the lower skeleton through the weight bearing activity of running but also strengthens the upper skeleton as well. Every strike of the ball utilises a broad range of muscle groups, each exerting a force on the supporting skeleton, which stimulates the bones to grow thicker and stronger. With the wrist being one of the most common osteoporosis fracture sites, weight-bearing exercise such as tennis is an excellent way of preventing this extremely prevalent disease.
- 4. Flexibility.** Every serve and every shot requires you to stretch and reach for the ball and without good flexibility, playing the game is nigh on impossible. When you can't reach a shot, you are usually short by a very small margin, so developing your flexibility is extremely beneficial. So if you aren't very supple, help your game by focusing on a programme of stretching exercises that includes the legs, back, arms and shoulders.
- 5. Speed and acceleration.** Quick reactions and short, rapid sprints around the court are key to tennis success and because speed is one of the first elements of fitness to be lost, regular tennis helps keep you sharp. To help your game, carry out specific speed drills, focusing on technique, changes of direction and acceleration. Speed practice games with a training partner, such as one partner sprinting and the other calling out left, right, back, etc will help you keep on your toes when you're on court.
- 6. Tennis should be kids play!** Hosting the world's greatest tennis tournament means that we're always searching for a British winner and the secret has to be getting children involved at an early age. Tennis is a fantastic activity for your child's all-round development because it requires co-ordination, balance, fitness, self-confidence, concentration, respect, communication skills, independence, intellectual stimulation and determination.
- 7. Concentration and focus.** At whatever level in any sport, your performance is improved if you can maintain concentration and focus on the task. As you progress higher, mental strength becomes more and more important and can often mean the difference between winning and losing. Applying yourself to keeping mentally sharp throughout each point of a match requires considerable focus, a skill that is completely transferable to numerous everyday situations.
- 8. Fun, fun, fun.** Last but by no means least, it is important to remember that tennis is a game, a leisure activity and is simply fun to play.

Mike's Tip of the week: A 20 year American study of 10,000 people found that playing tennis for just 3 hours per week at a moderately vigorous intensity, cut the risk of death from any cause by 50%. For less than 2% of your available weekly time, with the broad range of fitness benefits available, that has to be a worthwhile investment!



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