

Is Pickleball Good Exercise?

With a little precaution, you can prevent injuries and stay in this good-for-you game

If you've "hit a dink shot into the kitchen," you know the joy of pickleball. This booming sport is fast paced, simple to learn and serves up lots of health benefits.

Padel, a paddle sport similar to pickleball, is another activity becoming popular around the world, especially in Spanish-speaking countries. But padel and pickleball have some differences, including the type of court, equipment and scoring system.

What is pickleball?

Pickleball is similar to tennis but has its own court, paddle, ball and rules. Most people find it more forgiving than tennis and easier to play. But even though it can be less impactful on your joints, it's still a great workout, says physical therapist Jim Edwards, DPT. You need to move quickly and make rapid decisions.

"Advanced picklers are taking their play to the next level with tournaments across the U.S. and world," he adds.

Edwards shares more on how the sport of pickleball can boost your health and well-being.

Five health benefits of pickleball

"Pickleball appeals to people of all ages and experience levels," says Edwards. "It's a great sport for beginners who want to get more exercise."

And the pickleball culture is welcoming, despite its competitiveness. The teams and leagues are a draw for those who want to meet new people.

These unique features can translate to a range of physical and mental health benefits for those who play regularly:

1. Improves heart health

Current [physical activity guidelines](#) for adults recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week. Moderate intensity means you're at about 50% of your maximum effort.

Pickleball can help you meet these guidelines. One [study](#) of adults over the age of 50 found that more than 70% of their playing time was in the moderate to vigorous [heart rate zone](#).

"When you play pickleball, your heart rate and breathing rate are up and you're burning calories," notes Edwards. "That translates to better [heart health](#), lung health and weight management."

2. Enhances muscle and bone strength

Sports like pickleball stress your muscles and bones. Your body responds by making them stronger. Routine pickleball play can help you:

- Improve muscle strength.
- Prevent [osteoporosis](#), a disease that weakens your bones and can lead to fractures.

3. Increases balance and coordination

Balance is a key measure of being physically fit. [Good balance](#) reduces your risk of [falls](#), a serious health threat to older adults. Exercise is one of the best ways to improve your balance.

To succeed at pickleball, you need to:

- Move forward, backward and side-to-side around the court.
- Navigate your play around the "kitchen" (the no-volley zone on either side of the net).
- Place your shot strategically so your opponent can't hit the ball.
- React quickly to balls coming at you.

"These movements sharpen the connections between your body, brain and eyes," explains Edwards. "Over time, you develop better balance and coordination."

4. Boosts brain health

Exercise is not only good for your body — it also boosts [brain health](#). The benefits of routine physical activity on your brain include:

- Better [sleep](#).
- Improved cognition (ability to think, remember and process information).
- Reduced risk of [depression](#) and [anxiety](#).

“The social aspect of the game is also important,” says Edwards. “People interact with each other, enhancing their quality of life.”

According to a [review](#) of 13 studies on pickleball and mental health, players also report improvements in:

- Happiness.
- Life satisfaction.
- Well-being.

5. Lengthens lifespan

Research shows that exercise can help you live longer. One [study](#) of adults ages 40 to 85 found that a small increase in physical activity could reduce annual deaths. Adding just 10 more minutes of daily exercise could prevent 110,000 deaths each year.

Other studies link regular exercise to longer life expectancies. According to a recent [report](#), the life expectancy of tennis players is nearly 10 years longer than people who don’t exercise. The researchers noted that activities involving more social interaction showed the greatest longevity effects.

Pickleball injuries

Pickleball injuries have increased as the sport's popularity has risen.

"This increase isn't because pickleball is more dangerous than other fast-moving sports," clarifies Edwards. "Rather, it's due to more people playing."

The most common pickleball injuries Edwards treats include:

- [Overuse syndrome](#), inflammatory injuries that occur over time due to repetitive movements. Examples include tendonitis and joint inflammation.
- Sprains, sudden injuries to your ligaments.
- Strains, stretched or torn muscles.

Because of the quick steps, lunges, twists and arm swings, injuries typically affect players':

- [Ankles](#).
- [Back](#).
- [Elbows](#).
- [Knees](#).
- [Shoulders](#).

How to prevent pickleball injuries

You can prevent many pickleball injuries by taking precautions before and during play.

Edwards recommends:

- **Don't overdo it.** You may be tempted to play pickleball every day, but your body needs rest. If you have sore muscles or joints, use ice to reduce inflammation. Rest until the pain is gone. [Stretching](#) on your rest days can also promote recovery and improve flexibility.
- **Take care of your body.** All athletes, including pickleball players, need to [eat a healthy diet](#), [drink enough water](#) and [get good sleep](#). If you're healthy, you'll perform better and recover faster. You'll also have less fatigue, which can increase your risk of injury.

- **Warm up and cool down.** Get your blood flowing before you play with a three- to five-minute warmup. After, let your heart rate come down slowly. Stretching your major muscle groups before and after a match can also help prevent sprains and strains.
- **Wear the right shoes.** Court shoes are best for pickleball. They support your ankles and feet as you turn and pivot. Avoid running shoes, which are good for forward motion but not complex movements on the pickleball court.

Before you start pickleball

Are you ready to give pickleball a try? Check with your healthcare provider to make sure exercise is safe for you. If you've got the green light, look for a pickleball class for beginners, advises Edwards. A lesson before your first match can help you learn the game and proper form, which can help prevent injuries.

Pickleball can be competitive and intense. Start slowly and play with people at your skill level. Before you know it, you'll be part of the pickleball wave that's helping millions of people stay active and have fun.