

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Tennis: Tips for Playing Smart

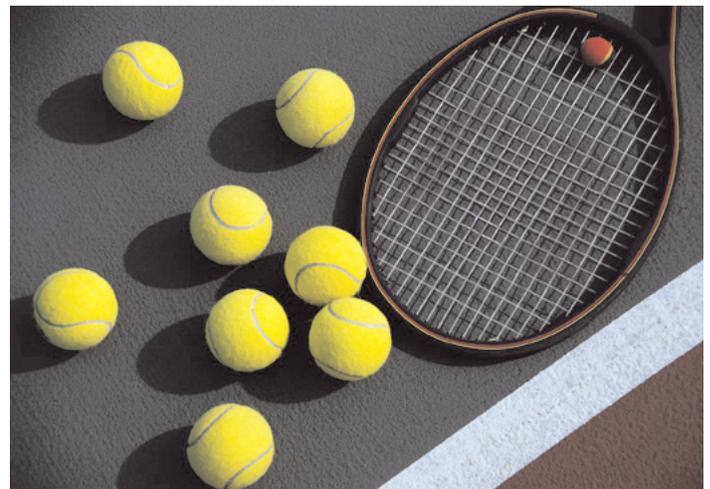
Tennis is commonly considered an elite game, thanks to the country clubs that typically provide tennis facilities. The combination of both high and low-exertion levels of the game, however, can bring not only a unique exercise experience, but also tremendous health benefits, such as reducing your risk of a heart attack.

Playing tennis is also convenient—you only need to find one other person to play with. In fact, if you can find a tennis facility that has a tennis wall—or a wall with a horizontal line that simulates a tennis net—you can get a great tennis workout all by yourself. In addition to helping to reduce your risk of a heart attack, playing tennis can also tone the muscles of your upper and lower body, burn calories, and improve your balance, hand-eye coordination, and agility.

The American Chiropractic Association recommends the following tips that will help you start—and continue—playing tennis safely.

Clothes, Shoes and Socks

- Avoid wearing tight clothes that pinch any part of your body. These “pinch points” can inhibit circulation, causing you to tire more quickly. They can also cause uncomfortable blisters and rashes.
- Because of the constant pounding on your feet, it is critical to select a true tennis shoe. Don't purchase shoes designed for basketball, running or cross-training. The tennis shoe should be low to the ground, yet be able to absorb shock to minimize stress on your feet.
- Keep your feet dry by wearing socks. Use foot powder to prevent blisters.
- Choose socks and clothes made from fabrics that absorb perspiration, allowing the skin to “breathe.” Some new synthetic fabrics are engineered to



“wick” the perspiration away from the body. Good old cotton and acrylic also work well.

Choosing a Racket

- The grip of your racket should be thick enough for your hand to fit around it without having your thumb and fingers overlap one another.
- The racket should be comfortably cushioned to absorb the shock that comes from hitting a tennis ball.
- Don't try to pick out a bigger racket to give you a better chance at hitting the ball. With an oversized racket, you tend to catch the ball on the extreme edges of the racket, which can twist your hands and wrists beyond their normal range of motion. Instead, look for a normal-sized racket, with a hitting area of 105 square inches or smaller.

Avoiding Injuries

- Select a tennis court with a safe playing surface. Because your knees, hips, and feet will take a pounding, surfaces that have some give—such as cushioned surfaces or even grass—are better than concrete.



- Check the tennis court for trash, sand or other objects that can make it easy for you to lose your footing when practicing or playing.
- If you are a beginning player, take tennis lessons. They teach good tennis habits and proper form, which will help take pressure off your wrists, spine and hips. If taking lessons is not an option, books, videos or DVDs can be very helpful in familiarizing your mind and body with the game.
- Warm up before practicing or playing. Rotate your legs, shoulders, hands and elbows in a slow, circular motion. Also, move forward and back, then left and right, across your end of the tennis court, simulating the movements you would make when

actually playing, but do it more slowly and deliberately.

- Drink water. When playing tennis, you lose a lot of fluids. Don't drink sodas because your body must use more water to push them out of your system than they put into your body.
- To determine the optimal amount of water needed by your body, take your body weight and cut it in half. That figure is the number of ounces of water you should drink. For example, if you weigh 130 pounds, you should try to drink 65 ounces of water per day.

Even with the best preventive measures, pain and injury can be a fact of life with any sport. If you experience pain or injury beyond simple muscle soreness, visit your doctor of chiropractic. Doctors of chiropractic are uniquely trained to treat common tennis injuries, such as tennis elbow, shoulder injuries, low-back injuries, sprained ankles, and knees. They can also help you choose proper rehabilitation exercises and prevention techniques to get you back on the court and reduce the likelihood of future injuries. ■



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit ACA's website at www.acatoday.org/patients.

*Scott Bautch, DC, DACBOH, CCSP, Past President, ACA Council on Occupational Health, **Consultant***