

Fit to Win

Fitness is a key that will assist you in winning more tennis matches – particularly the close ones. Here are some tips that will improve your overall fitness and consequently your tennis game. Before you start fitness training I recommend following the American College of Sports Medicine's guidelines that state men over 45 and women over 55 and over should get physician clearance. This wise step is a good reason to see your doctor for your annual physical. Then, start slowly and find activities you like so you make fitness a habit.

Before and after exercise monitor what you eat and drink. I suggest taking a light meal at least 90 minutes before working out. Your body weight in pounds divided by two equals your daily fluid intake. Hence, a 150 pound person needs 75 ounces of fluid. Also, during hot weather drink 17-20 ounces of fluid two hours before working out, 7 to 10 ounces every 10 to 20 minutes during activity and 16 to 24 ounces for every pound lost following exercise.

Learn to warm-up and cool down. You must slowly prepare your body to exercise by gradually increasing your heart rate and body temperature with a proper warm-up. For example, if you are going to exercise on a treadmill for 30 minutes, the first five minutes should be a slow walk with gradual increase of pace. Also, the last five minutes should be walking with steadily decreasing the speed.

Improve your flexibility which, besides cardio vascular and strength training, is one of the three pillars of fitness yet most overlooked. For example, I highly recommend stretching your hamstrings which are muscles in the back of the upper leg. On a hard flat surface lay on your back with both legs straight. While keeping one leg flat on the floor, slowly lift the other leg to the ceiling with your toes flexed toward your face and your knee straight. Hold the stretch for at least 30 seconds then switch legs. One of the best ways to increase range of motion is taking regular yoga classes. There are numerous yoga disciplines, and find an instructor and program you like. Yoga improves concentration and balance while decreasing stress.

Improve your abdominal fitness. Your “powerhouse” includes your abdomen, low back and buttocks. This is where all motion originates then proceeds to the extremities. Hence, a good tennis swing begins with a stable core. A great way to improve your abdominal fitness is to attend mat Pilates classes. Pilates is one of the fastest growing fitness formats and like yoga is excellent for tennis players.

Strengthen your shoulder which is the most complex joint in the body. To hit those important serves and overheads do throwers exercises to improve shoulder strength and stave off rotator cuff injuries. Here is an external rotation exercise: bend your arm to 90 degrees, palm faces the

stomach and keep your elbow next to your side; with light resistance rotate your arm away from your body. Literally, practice throwing balls, and see your certified Fitness Professional for more important shoulder exercises.

Do weight bearing exercises at least twice a week. Body squats, lunges and push ups are some of the many exercise you can do without equipment. You want muscle endurance rather than bulk and light weights will realize this goal. Move weights slowly, and one of the most common exercise mistakes is lowering weights quickly. After your muscles contract to raise a weight, fight against gravity and slowly lower the weight during the eccentric motion. Give muscle groups about 48 hours rest before training them again.

Run if you can two or three times per week. Running is one best and quickest ways to improve overall fitness. However, running is difficult on your joints and definitely not for everyone. If you are able to run do mostly interval and some endurance training. Playing a tennis match is a series of work and rest cycles which is interval training. For example, run fast for 30 seconds then walk for 30 seconds. Gradually improve your work/rest ratios to 2/1 or 3/1. Also, if you are going to play for hours in the hot sun you need a strong aerobic base. You can build a solid aerobic base by running long distances like three or more miles. If you are not able to run try an elliptical machine which is similar to running with less body weight. For all cardio training I strongly recommend people use a heart rate monitor to exercise within safe limits. Here is a general formula: $220 - \text{age} = \text{maximum heart rate}$, multiplied by 65% to 85%. Consult with your physician and certified personal trainer for your individual range.

Get within five pounds of your ideal weight. Keeping your weight down will surely benefit your tennis game. You can only hit shots you can reach, and you must be in good position to hit quality tennis shots. The above mentioned fitness tips will assist weight loss, and remember just simple lifestyle adjustments can have big results. For example, you can drop pounds by merely substituting milk for crème in your coffee or drinking water instead of soft drinks.

Now that you have several ways to improve your fitness and consequently your tennis game, start by doing just a couple things you like so you can stay with them and see results. Improving fitness is like playing tennis for consistency is the ultimate strategy.

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