

Tennis



There are more fitness elements involved in tennis than may initially meet the (Hawk) eye! Strength and power are required for service and creating ‘winners’ from groundstrokes. Speed and agility are required to cover the court, get into the correct position to have time to play the next shot accurately and not to be worked around the court by the opponent. Endurance to remain competitive throughout the match, hand-eye co-ordination, balance and ‘touch’ to execute a wide range of shots from all around the court.

When thinking of preparing well for tennis (and to avoid injury) there are many facets to be addressed. So that the experience does not feel overwhelming, start with your weakest area, remembering that it takes about 6 weeks for the training effects to embed, with long term adaptations taking place rather than just short term changes!

ANYONE FOR TENNIS?

Due to the complex nature of ‘fitness for tennis’ the best way of training is to think about the skills and techniques necessary and isolate them, so focussed, precise training can take place. For example ‘covering the court’ would entail muscular endurance, speed, co-ordination and agility (being able to change direction quickly, whilst maintaining balance) and cardio-vascular endurance as a close club match could go well beyond an hour.



Training that includes shuttle runs, side stepping, zig-zag running and running backwards are specific as you may be required to any or all of these movements. By repeating them, you will develop muscular endurance (being able to use the same muscles over and over again without getting tired) and you will challenge your cardiovascular fitness to improve (allowing your heart to pump oxygenated blood to your muscles so they function well and don’t fatigue). Change of direction with the use of cones or court markings if you are training at the club will hone agility, balance and help with ‘quick feet’. Training in this way is also great for those who can’t afford hours of training as you train multiple fitness elements at once. If you have a busy schedule, but can spare 5 minutes to read, [this article may provide further ways to maximise effective training](#) when time is precious. As they say- “train hard, play easy!” [More information on fitness components and examples of training exercises can be found here.](#)

We have yet to mention mobility and flexibility- there is a subtle difference between the two: mobility is the ability to move a joint through its full range of motion. As mobility focuses on joints, we are looking at where bones meet and the movement in that specific area.

Flexibility of the other hand is being able to hold one particular position due to the lengthening (stretch) of a muscle. Therefore we associate flexibility with a specific muscle eg the hamstrings but in contrast we talk about the mobility of the hip or shoulder joint.

Both are integral to smooth, injury-free tennis however dynamic stretching which happens when we move, as part of a warm-up (especially when constrained by time) is enough, as long as it is carried out gently to start with a gradual increase in intensity/speed etc.

If you would like to look into these areas in greater depth [this article may be of interest](#).

Although perhaps not as “exciting” as other fitness elements, they do have a huge influence on elements such as strength and court coverage. If a joint is limited for any reason, any strengthening will only happen in that range of movement (not all the way through to end range). If we don’t strengthen end range, we increase the possibility of injury as our body is not exposed to these demands, until a limb is moving quickly and other muscles are not able to engage to control the action. If we have limited flexibility and mobility, we will have to expend more energy to cover the court and therefore, as well as not getting to the ball smoothly, we will tire quicker through the match. Ending up on the wrong end of the result could have as much to do if not more with general fitness than tennis skills alone!



Tennis is a sport that combines many elements of fitness and therefore you get a lot of “bang for your buck”. The caveat is that due to the complexities and demands placed on the body those taking part need to be mindful of frequency and intensity of play. Injuries such as tennis elbow or knee complaints arise usually from playing too much (an overuse injury) and asking the body to move quickly and in rapidly different directions when the muscles are getting tired. This then means they do not respond as quickly to make the adjustments the brain wants. [If you have experienced injury from tennis or want to try and prevent one this article may be of interest to you](#). There is always the pressure of the British weather and trying to squeeze in extra games before the weather breaks, as well as club and national competitions that may increase the frequency of play for some players. Just be careful and listen to your body. Normally after physical exertion our bodies will return to normal within 48 hours. If this does not happen, then it could be an early warning sign of overdoing it a little. Remember- a little rest now is better than playing on and having to rehab over several months if a more serious injury were to occur from playing on.

Getting involved with a tennis club is a great way to meet new people, make new friends and eye-up some friendly rivalries, so the social as well as physical benefits are great. If you are interested in finding out more why not visit <https://www.torquaytennisclub.co.uk/> for more information?