Get Your Game On

The Benefits of Playing Tennis

If you've ever watched a tennis match on television and felt inspired to hit a few balls yourself, your fitness instincts are good. Tennis is fun, challenging and offers a wealth of health benefits. Millions of Americans enjoy playing tennis year round.

"Tennis changes lives," says tennis great Vic Braden. "I've been teaching tennis for 70 years and it has tremendous value. Some people say they're too old to learn in their 60s, but we have tournaments for 90-year-olds — so those 60-year-olds have 30 years to get ready!"

Benefits of Tennis

Playing tennis on a regular basis is great for your body and your mind. As with most aerobic exercise, playing tennis is heart healthy, and increases strength, balance, coordination and overall fitness.

Braden points out that besides being a great sport, tennis is wonderful for the cardiovascular system and weight loss. "Whole families can enjoy tennis," notes Braden. "There are tournaments for mothers and daughters or fathers and sons, and for older players, there are so many opportunities to meet other players and to travel to other cities."

Equipment

Playing tennis requires a few pieces of equipment: a good racket, tennis balls and a good pair of court (tennis) shoes. Tennis pros or friends who play regularly may be a good source of information about which tennis equipment will best suit your needs. Consider taking a few lessons to learn how, and where, to stand, how to hit the ball, and overall game strategy.

Prepare to Play

Tennis works every major muscle group in the body. Prior to launching into a full court game, loosen your muscles with a 10-minute warm-up like walking or jogging, followed by stretching. Remember to stretch again after your game. Bring plenty of water or healthy sports drinks, stay hydrated and use sunscreen.

Check with Your Doctor

Tennis is a sport that most people can play — however, certain individuals need to check with a physician before doing so. If you have chest discomfort during physical activity, are currently sedentary, have rheumatoid arthritis, heart disease, recent surgery, joint replacement, a pacemaker or high or low blood pressure, discuss your intentions with your doctor first before taking up the game.

To order Vic Braden's new book, *If I'm only 22, How Come I'm 82*, send an e-mail to vicbraden@vicbraden.com.

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