

Strengthen Your Core, Tighten Your Rear, Meditate – Or Just Play Tennis!

Core muscle strengthening is all the rage these days. As a physical therapist I know and support the importance of strengthening your core muscles. As a tennis player I know you can do this without a floor mat. Finding a sport like tennis where you can have fun and get core muscle strengthening without even noticing is a great way to exercise. Core muscles are the abdominal or stomach muscles - we have several layers of them. Most people when they talk of the core muscles mean the deeper layers.

And that's not all; you can tighten your **rear end**. Just running after the ball will get those gluteus maxumus muscles working. You can also work on your **meditation skills** at the same time. Multi-tasking at its best.

These are just some of the benefits you'll receive while playing tennis. When you start loving the game, you won't even notice how hard you are working.

I've read articles about how you have to get in shape to play tennis. I say, **play tennis to get in shape!** I understand the importance of fitness for competitive players but when you just want an activity to do to keep you mobile and feeling good, then do something you like to do instead of forcing yourself to do exercises you don't enjoy or worse, feel guilty about not doing.

As we age one of the most important factors in staying healthy is **exercise**. One of the most important factors for maintaining your exercise routine is **enjoyment** and **motivation**.

Playing a sport that you love is a great way to exercise. You needn't "get in shape" to play tennis. Of course, you can if you want to and you may want to after you get into it. Otherwise, a **gradual tennis warm-up** such as starting with mini tennis (mini tennis is rallying within the service squares) and then warming up your strokes, including your serve, slowly at first and gradually putting more speed and power behind the ball is a great way to warm up. If you feel obligated to stretch, do so after tennis when your muscles are warmed up. Stretching before an activity decreases the power generated by your muscles.

And there's more! Here are some more benefits of playing tennis:

- It is a great way to **socialize** and have fun with like-minded friends.
- This weight bearing exercise is a great for your bones so it helps **prevent osteoporosis**.
- You get all the benefits of regular exercise - you start to **feel great- more energy – sleep better – your mood improves** and you look forward to exercising instead of making excuses why you can't.



– You can practice **mindful meditation** (this is when you are totally concentrating on what you are doing at the moment) by concentrating on say, the sound of the ball, or staring at the ball, or just noticing your breathing. By doing this you will notice that your tennis is actually better because you aren't thinking about your stroke or what you have to get done today. It's like taking a vacation without leaving town. Start with doing it for one point every once in a while and then for longer and longer periods. It helps relax the mind and you'll enjoy the tennis even more.

If you don't notice any improvement in your stomach muscles, take a lesson and the tennis pro will show you how to hit the ball while using your body. You'll be hitting harder with less stress on your arm, as well.

Just like any exercise, 3 times a week is recommended and because you are having fun you don't notice that 4 to 6 weeks have gone by but you are starting to notice the benefits. If you can't manage 3 times a week start with once a week. Remember, no pressure, if you are not having fun, find another sport you love!

How much fun can you handle when exercising?

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