

5 Hidden Health Benefits of Pickleball

By Lisa Fields | March 26, 2019

Pick up a paddle to protect your heart, boost your mood, and more!



By now you've heard of pickleball. The increasingly popular paddle sport, which has similarities to tennis and ping pong, has attracted players of all ages and fitness levels—but especially active older adults.

What's so great about it?

For starters, it's incredibly accessible. You can input your zip code on the U.S.A. Pickleball Association website (<https://www.places2play.org/>) to find out where to play near you. Beginners are always welcome, equipment is often provided, and the rules are easy to learn.

Among the reasons older adults love pickleball: The court is small enough that you don't need to move much to hit the ball, especially if you're playing doubles. The game encourages players to socialize. There's none of the frustration factor that accompanies sports like golf—it's designed to be carefree and fun.

“Pickleball is a great sport for active living across the lifetime,” says Jonathan Casper, Ph.D., an associate professor of sports management at North Carolina State University. “Because it's similar to other racquet sports, you can learn the game pretty quickly, and you can play for as long as your body will let you.”

If that's not reason enough to give it a try, consider these five health perks of playing pickleball.

Pickleball Benefit #1: You'll Lower Your Risk of Heart Disease

A recent study in the *International Journal of Research in Exercise Physiology* found middle-aged and older adults who played one hour of pickleball three days per week for six weeks improved their blood pressure, cholesterol (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/8-things-dont-know-cholesterol/>), and cardiorespiratory fitness levels.

“These positive changes to heart health are significant, as a large number of adults have elevated cholesterol levels, hypertension, or low cardiorespiratory endurance, which puts them at increased risk of cardiovascular disease,” says study author Lance Dalleck, Ph.D., an associate professor of exercise and sport science at Western Colorado University.

In addition to setting up a regular pickleball game, check out our guide to more simple lifestyle changes that can help lower your blood pressure (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/8-ways-lower-blood-pressure-without-meds/>).

Pickleball Benefit #2: You'll Cut Your Risk of Depression

Exercise in general is a proven mood booster (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/exercise-blues/>)—and pickleball is no exception. A recent study in *Leisure Studies* found older adults who played in pickleball tournaments had a lower risk of depression.

“I believe it makes older adults’ lives richer and happier,” says study author Jungsu Ryu, Ph.D., an assistant professor of sport management at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. “Engaging seriously in playing pickleball may buffer any type of negative emotions that people have during transitions to retirement and later life.”

If tournaments aren’t for you, no problem. The important thing is the commitment to pickleball as serious leisure, or the continued pursuit of a sport or hobby so you gain special skills, knowledge, and experience.

Pickleball Benefit #3: You’ll Get Hooked on Exercise

Many older adults start playing pickleball because a friend or partner suggests they join them one day. Some may be skeptical when they arrive, but more often than not, they enjoy it enough to come back for more, Casper says.

Science offers one explanation: A study in the *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* found people become loyal to the sport because it helps them meet their fitness goals and enhance social connections. It’s a two-for-one workout!

“Sometimes people are more willing to play a sport when it’s fun, and people report that playing pickleball is way more fun than going for a walk or going on the treadmill,” says Casper, the study author.

“If you were to spend 60 minutes in the gym,” he continues, “it usually feels like 60 minutes. But when you’re doing something you enjoy, like pickleball, where you typically have time to talk and laugh in the game, all of a sudden you’ve been playing for 60 minutes and you think, ‘Where did the time go?’”

Only about 20 percent of adults get the recommended amount of physical activity each week, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That means a lot of people may need to find an activity they'll stick to—and pickleball may be the ticket.

Learn more about your weekly exercise needs in this simple guide (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/qa-3-types-of-exercise-older-adults-should-do-every-week/>).

Pickleball Benefit #4: You'll Socialize More—and Feel Less Lonely

Pickleball is a great social outlet. And that desire to connect with friends will keep you coming back again and again.

“There's this fun aspect, which really ties into social support,” says Chris Gagliardi, a spokesperson for the American Council on Exercise.

“It's not this individual journey, like going to the gym by yourself to walk on the treadmill,” he says. “You can play doubles, you can have a teammate, and someone is expecting you. For some people, it can be the only socializing they may have that week.”

Even while on the court, interactions between pickleball players are different from those in other physical activities, Casper says.

“Because this is a sport with two people playing together, you have that engagement,” he says. “And people are so passionate about pickleball—they look for opportunities to show other people and share their enjoyment. That's more so with pickleball than any other sport that I've studied.”

Plus, knowing that someone is depending on you may give you a greater sense of purpose and increase your devotion to the game even more.

“If you were my workout partner and you didn’t show up, I could still get my workout in,” Gagliardi says. “But in pickleball, the game couldn’t take place if you didn’t show up. You have a lot riding on it.”

Get along really well with your pickleball pals? Why not extend the outing with coffee or lunch afterward—or plan one of these fun friend dates (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/best-ways-to-spend-an-hour-with-a-friend/>)?

Pickleball Benefit #5: You May Stay Independent Longer

Older adults who play pickleball regularly may improve their reflexes and balance (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/balance-stability-exercises-seniors/>), which can help you live independently for longer, Gagliardi says.

You may also improve your range of motion, which can help minimize arthritis symptoms (<https://www.silversneakers.com/blog/arthritis-exercise-rules-follow/>) that prevent you from performing everyday tasks with ease.

“As a result of not being physically active, you typically lose range of motion,” Gagliardi says. “If you’re doing something you enjoy, you’re more likely to do it.”

“But also, with pickleball, you have to think about the strategy and the hand-eye coordination,” he explains. “If you’re sedentary, you’re not doing that at all.”

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Mike Manser

I play pickleball and run a league at Safety Harbor Community Center in Safety Harbor, FL and they would like information on how to accept Silver Sneaker. Contact person is Tim Sattinger 727-724-1530 650 9th Av S Safety Harbor

Like · Reply · 2 · 2w



Pat Carpenter

I play pickleball at least three times a week and love it!

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Nancy Yuktonis Solak

LOVE the game! Used to love tennis, but too much real estate to cover and too hard on the joints. The paddle and ball are lighter than their tennis equivalents.

Like · Reply · 1 · 1w



Phyllis Gordon S'Dao

LOVE...LOVE...LOVE PICKLEBALL

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Madie Fisher Zilke

I play pickleball in St Cloud FL 2 nights a week outside (Delaware Godwin Park) and weekdays inside on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Civic Center on 17th We have all the equipment needed to learn and enjoy the game, all ages and all skill levels welcome. Contact Madie Zilke 321-624-3064 For more info

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