

PRE-GAME WARM UP: A vital component for pickleball success



A cold muscle is a muscle at risk. In the bustling world of sports and recreation, the game of pickleball has emerged as a beloved pastime, capturing the hearts of enthusiasts of all ages. However, amid the excitement and enthusiasm of the game, one crucial aspect often takes a backseat – the pre-game warm up.

“For all sports that involve twisting, pivoting, short sprints and quick stops like pickleball, tennis, basketball, and soccer it is very important to warm up and stretch before playing. This will help reduce the risks of muscle and tendon injury like Achilles tendon ruptures, back strain, and hamstring pulls” says Alan Reznik, MD, FAAOC, an orthopedic surgeon at Connecticut Orthopaedics who specializes in sports medicine and sports-related injuries.

Why is warm up important?

Pickleball, known for its quick bursts of movement, lateral shifts, and explosive shots, places demands on the body that can easily lead to strains, sprains, and other injuries. Engaging in a well-rounded warm up workout routine has become increasingly vital to ensuring players are not only at the top of their game but also safe from potential harm.

How long should you warm up?

Dr. Reznik says this really depends on your age and intensity of play.

- Competitive athletes at a high level will spend more than 20 minutes warming up
- Most average players should take 5- 10 minutes to warm up.
- Older player may need a longer time at a lower intensity than younger players

Does warming up prevent injury?

A warmed-up body is a body ready to perform optimally. Engaging in light cardio exercises raises the heart rate, increases blood flow, and oxygenates the muscles, which in turn leads to improved physical performance. Players who invest time in warmups often find themselves with heightened reflexes, better agility, and increased endurance throughout the match.

What are the common injuries from skipping a warm up?

“The most common injuries are tight tendons, ligaments, and stiff muscles. This means everything from cramping of the calf or foot to Achilles tendon rupture, hamstring strains and low back strain,” says Reznik.

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A 5-minute warm up to boost your pickleball game

First start with a brisk walk around the court until warmed, then:

- Neck stretches - Gently tilt your head side to side and hold for 15-20 seconds. Then, slowly roll your head in a circular motion, both clockwise and counterclockwise.
- Shoulder stretches - : Extend one arm at a time across your chest and use your other arm to gently pull it closer to your body and hold for 15-20 seconds. Rolling your shoulders in a circular motion will also help warm up your joints.
- Arm and wrist stretches - Extend one arm straight in front of you, palm facing up, and use your other hand to gently pull your fingers back towards your body. For wrist stretches, extend one arm straight in front of you, palm facing down, and use your other hand to gently pull your fingers towards the ground.
- Leg (quad) stretches - Perform standing quad stretches by standing straight, bending one knee, and bringing your foot towards your glutes and hold for 15-20 seconds before you switch sides.
- Calf stretches - Lean against a wall, placing one foot forward with a slight bend in the knee, and pressing the heel of the back foot into the ground, hold for 15-20 seconds and then switch legs.
- Core stretches - Stand with your feet hip-width apart, raise your arms overhead, and lean gently to one side, feeling a stretch along your side for 15-20 seconds.

Why is cooling down important?

“If the game is intense, then cooling off may mean drinking fluids, moving to a cooler place and walking off the muscle soreness (lactic acid build up) in the muscles. Cooling down after your workout allows for a gradual recovery of pre-exercise heart rate and blood pressure,” says Reznik.



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