

Racquet Sports

A guide for heart patients

Racquet sports such as badminton and tennis are good ways of maintaining and improving health and fitness and are fun ways to keep active.

When you have a heart condition, there are some important things to consider before you participate in any of these activities. Most racquet sports are classed as strenuous activities and therefore it is essential that you have the ability (stamina / fitness) to perform at the level necessary for the activity (game). The competitive nature of racquet sports can make you underestimate how hard you are exercising and therefore may cause you to overexert yourself. It is important to be aware of this and choose opponents and doubles partners that you can play comfortably with. Squash is particularly strenuous due to the intensity and nature of the game and is generally not recommended for heart patients. The main reason for this activity is the stop/start nature of the game and the short bursts of high intensity.

When can I start playing?

Returning to racquet sports should be discussed on an individual basis with your doctor or your cardiac exercise professional, especially if you wish to take this up as a new activity. The information from your exercise assessment can be used to determine if you have the right level of fitness to play racquet sports. When you can start will depend on your own circumstances and specific cardiac condition.

For example

If you have had Open-Heart surgery

- You should wait at least twelve weeks to ensure good healing of the breast bone

If you have a Pacemaker or implantable cardioverter device (ICD)?

- Dependent on the device you may need to wait at least six weeks to allow the leads to settle
- If your device is implanted on the same side as you hold your racquet this may cause problems with repetitive straining of the device leads and therefore the activity may not be recommended. However, this will depend on the type of device and racquet sport and/or your technique. You should discuss your individual circumstance with a member of your cardiac rehabilitation team, cardiac technician, cardiologist or GP
- Certain racquet sports may be considered unsuitable based on medical or clinical reason for the device.

How fit do I need to be?

Racquet sports potentially demand a high level of exertion but this will depend on how you play, the level of your game, and the ability of those you are playing against. If you can run up a flight of stairs, briskly walk up an incline or are able to run short distances comfortably, you are probably sufficiently fit to play.

You will also need ability to change direction and turn at speed i.e. you need good agility.

Should I warm up and cool down?

- It is essential to perform a warm up and cool down.
- You should spend 15 minutes gradually increasing movements and actions that mimic those of actual play before starting your game
- At the end of your game it is important not to stop abruptly - you should spend at least ten minutes gradually cooling down; include gentle walking and stretching.



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How should I feel whilst I am playing?

- You should feel comfortable and able to continue with your game. It is okay to be slightly out of breath as long as you can still talk in full sentences
- If you are struggling to keep up with the pace of play you should reduce the intensity of the game. Try to ensure your partner /opponent plays at your skill level
- If you are exhausted after the game or the following day, you have probably overdone it and need to reduce the pace or how long you play for next time.

If you have attended cardiac rehabilitation think about how you feel compared with how you felt in the exercise sessions. Your level of exertion should feel similar.

How can I get into shape?

- Attend your local cardiac rehabilitation exercise sessions and tell the team of your wish to play a particular racquet sport so they can advise you and help you to prepare as appropriate
- As with any activity 'start low, go slow'
- Build up your stamina gradually by walking regularly and incorporating inclines, as well as working on your ability to jog or run comfortably
- Start by playing gently for short periods maybe against opponents you know you can play very comfortably and build up your fitness before attempting a match.



What other things should I consider?

- Keep your legs moving in between play to prevent light-headedness
- Allow at least one to two hours after a main meal before playing
- Drink more water when you are playing and afterwards
- Reduce the intensity of your game in an environment that is hot and humid, play in cooler parts of day
- Only play when you are feeling well.

Stop playing if you experience any chest discomfort, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or your GTN spray/tablets, seek medical advice as soon as possible.



This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiac Rehabilitation www.acpicr.com

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

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