

HEALTHY BODY

Tennis, Badminton, and Soccer Top List of Sports Scientifically Proven to Increase Life Expectancy



Allie Flinn • December 4, 2021





Photo: Getty Images/ Tony Anderson

Exercise, in general, is key to living longer. But playing certain sports can increase your life expectancy even more. A study done by the Copenhagen City Heart Study (CCHS) and published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* followed 8,577 people over 25 years and found that playing certain sports increased life expectancy—with one adding almost a decade to the lives of participants.

One thing the top three—tennis (9.7 years), badminton (6.2 years), and soccer (4.7 years)—all have in common is that they offer more social interaction than individual sports. While cycling and swimming made the list right after soccer, they

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further emphasizes the link between social interaction and longevity. Take, for instance, the people who live in Blue Zones (aka the longest-living people in the world): one of their pillars of longevity is connecting with others and maintaining strong relationships.



Furthermore, the study determined that these findings were the same even when researchers controlled for other aspects like education, socioeconomic status, and age. But that doesn't necessarily mean that these factors didn't come into play, as one of the study's co-authors told *The New York Times*, citing the example that people with money and the leisure time to play tennis may live longer due to that and not the actually tennis-playing.

In general, though, racket sports appear to be particularly great at increasing life expectancy, due in part to their social aspect, but also perhaps because they are physically challenging and require balance and mental strategy, along with certain visual and spatial elements. A study of Korean women aged 60 and older found that playing table tennis (aka Ping-Pong) improved their cognitive function more than walking, dancing, or resistance training. And a study of inactive older adults in rural Utah found that pickleball improved their vertical jump (a marker of mobility) and cognitive performance, and there was a decrease in self-reported pain. Participants in the study also reported a desire to keep playing pickleball even after the study was over. So if you needed another reason to embrace the resurgent tennis skirt trend, consider this your sign.

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