



Ace your tennis game while staying injury free



GUEST CORNER

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Tennis is a social but also demanding sport that combines speed, agility, strength, cardiovascular fitness, balance and hand-eye coordination. The game involves explosive forces through your upper extremities and fast acceleration and deceleration from your lower extremities.

Preparing for an outdoor tennis season involves more than just on-court practice. By understanding how common injuries occur, committing to an exercise routine that incorporates strength training, flexibility exercises, balance, and recovery strategies, you can greatly reduce your risk of injury. Invest effort into injury prevention will not only enhance performance but, more importantly, provide you a safer and more enjoyable tennis season.

CAUSES OF MOST COMMON TENNIS INJURIES:

Most shoulder, elbow, and wrist injuries arise from chronic repetitive, overuse movements. Hip, knee, and ankle injuries are mostly acute injuries caused by sudden torquing and fast-paced movements.

The serve is the most strenuous stroke because of the overhead reach, followed by the ball impact and then a multidirectional movement from your wrist, through your spine to your ankles. The repetitive swinging of the racquet with ball impact, can cause shoulder rotator cuff tears and impingement, tennis elbow tendinitis, and wrist strains:

- The rotator cuff tendons are a group of muscles that transform into tendons to support the shoulder and can get inflamed from overuse.
- "Tennis elbow" (or lateral epicondylitis) is inflammation of the forearm/wrist muscles on the outside part of your elbow due to overuse and/or an incorrect racquet grip as well as being "too wristy" (i.e., not having a stable wrist position during your tennis stroke).

Leg injuries result from the fast pace running back and forth, sudden stop-turn, jumping, and overreaching and stretching:

- Knee injuries can affect the patella (kneecap) causing "jumper's knee" (or tendinitis) due to inflammation of the front knee tendon.
- Muscle spasm, strains, and tears in mostly the Hamstring muscle (back of your thigh) calf and abdominal/groin muscles.
- Ankle sprains occur when the outside ankle ligaments are overstretched or torn.
- Achilles tendinitis from repetitive running movements causing inflammation of the Achilles tendon.

Lower back injuries result mostly from hyper extension (arching) of the lower back during serve, overhead shots or deep ground strokes.

Poor balance when running backwards or jumping can result in falls with more serious injuries.

CONDITIONING PREPARATION TIPS

The following conditioning tips will get you get ready to transition from indoor tennis to playing tennis outside in the fresh air:

1. Improve your general fitness by increasing your cardiovascular conditioning. A tennis match can go on for hours and if your fitness level and endurance are lacking, you are more prone to injuries as your body and muscles fatigue.
2. Include stretches in your daily workout routine such as:
 - Hamstring stretches: lie on your back with the stretched leg up in the air with a strap around your foot. Pull the stretched leg gently to your chest.
 - ITB (outside thigh muscle) and inner thigh(groin) stretches: keep straight leg in the air and open leg sideways until a gentle pull is felt in your inner thigh, then cross leg over down leg and feel the pull in the outer thigh.
 - Quadriceps stretches: lie on your side and pull bent knee behind you to feel a pull in your front thigh.
 - Calf stretches: stand with one leg behind the other leg, foot and toes of back leg pointing forward. Leaning forward, bend front knee until a pull is felt behind your calf muscle.
3. To minimize rotator cuff injuries, focus on your scapula girdle stability:
 - Lean with your elbows on a table in a semi plank position. Engage your core. Pull shoulder blades down and pinch shoulder blades together and push away (pro/retraction) hold each 5 sec x 10 reps.
4. Strengthening exercises to improve your balance and agility:
 - Core stability: a strong core supports overall body movement and balance. Example is a table or floor plank.
 - Lower body strength: focus on quads, hamstrings, calves, and glutes. Examples are squats sitting back onto your heels, using the glutes and quads to control the squat.

WARMING UP

Before a tennis game, perform warm up movements that include fast-paced movements as well as dynamic stretches. It prepares the body by increasing your body temperature and blood flow to the muscles, heart, and lungs, stretch the muscles and joints and it helps to wake up the nervous system and muscle memory to prepare for the vigorous activity.

Perform all exercises in a controlled manner, taking deep breaths, maintaining your balance and engage your core and pelvic floor muscles. Do for about 15 min before each tennis match:



1. Side shuffles with knees slightly bent and your body in the "ready position" rotating torso and arms from side to side then progress to karaoke moves (shoulders square and performing zig-zag twists with your hips and legs);
2. Straight leg marches by kicking your one leg straight up in front of your body to meet your opposite hand and arm;
3. Leg swings with gentle torso twists; and
4. Mimic a forehand, back hand, and overhead shots to reinforce your muscle memory to get your mind and body ready for the game

COOLING DOWN:

Gentle static stretches where each stretch is held for about 30 seconds. Focus on deep diaphragm/ rib expansion breathing and relax gently into the stretch with each exhale.

Stay proactive, listen to your body, and embrace a holistic approach to your tennis preparation. Enjoy a healthy, injury-free tennis game and contact your physician or physical therapist if you experience any physical discomfort that may hinder your game.

Lize Lubbe is the owner of Lize Lubbe Physical Therapy with its main practice located at 892 Route 35 in Cross River and a PT Studio in the premises of Apex Fitness (where her team focus on the rehabilitation of sports-related injuries). Learn more by calling 914-875-9430, emailing contact@lizeclubbept.com or visiting www.lizeclubbept.com.



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