

Warming up before playing tennis in cold weather

Many of us continue to play tennis outside despite the cold weather. However, the older we get the more susceptible our bodies are to the cold and its effects. It is important to always warm up before playing but even more so when playing in cold weather.

The main aim of warming up is to increase the heart rate gradually which then increases the amount of blood circulating through our muscle to warm them. It also makes the ligaments and tendons more flexible and so helps to avoid injury.

When the weather is cold it is harder to keep these structures warm and flexible. It is a bit like driving a car in cold weather. You usually let it warm up a little before driving off...well your body needs the same care.

So what should you do?

- Firstly wear the right gear for the conditions. If you run around your body will get hotter and you will sweat. If your first layer is a non-wicking textile eg cotton, then it will become damp and lose its insulating effects causing you to lose heat. Wear a synthetic, breathable layer to draw the sweat away. Your second layer should be an insulating layer eg fleece, and if you need a third layer then a loose, waterproof and windproof material top or jacket would be good. Another effect of age is that the circulation in your extremities is less efficient and in cold weather your body compounds this by trying to keep your core warm at the expense of your extremities. By layering up correctly, your core stays warm enabling your body to keep your extremities warmer.
- Gradually increase your heart rate (ideally for about 5-10 minutes) by gentle jogging or gentle running on the spot or perhaps up and down stairs if you feel particularly energetic!
- Then try some dynamic stretches to stretch your muscles, tendons and ligaments such as lunges, trunk twists, reaching up and circling your arms.

You can warm up at home so long as you start playing within about 30 minutes. Cooling down after play will also help prevent injuries. With good preparation, good fitness levels and good aftercare you'll be able to make the most of your winter playing...have fun!

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NB: If you have any existing medical conditions then you should check with your GP or appropriate healthcare professional before undertaking any exercise or stretching programmes.