

TRAINING & FITNESS FOR TABLE TENNIS



By Tara & Eugene Fusco



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Introduction to fitness in Table Tennis

As in all sports, fitness can play a major factor in the success or failure of the competitor. Where players of a similar tactical and technical proficiency meet each other, the fitter player will always win out and a lack of fitness can hamper progress in the sport. Below I have broken down the main fitness components to focus on for the aspiring Table Tennis player:

Stamina: The stamina factor comes into play at the end of a long match where the fitter player can gain the initiative through having more energy and more time with the ball. If you are less tired you can also think more clearly and it can give you the psychological edge at the most important time in the match. The easiest way to build up stamina is to run, cycle, skip or swim for about 20 minutes between one and three times a week. Start gently if you are not used to this type of exercise and build it up gradually.

Strength: The benefits of acquiring additional strength are three-fold. It will allow you to hit the ball harder and thus put your opponent under more pressure, it will aid your ability to last longer as you will be more able to resist the forces of gravity and as you can play more within your maximum effort range, this will give you more accuracy and widen the margin for error on your shots. There are various ways to increase strength and I will examine these in more detail in the following chapters.

Speed: This can be broken down into speed of movement and speed of play. Speed of movement is the ability to get into position for your shots and to get to balls that may take you by surprise. The ability to get into the right position quickly is a major boost as it gives you more time on the ball which increases accuracy and improves shot choice. Speed of play is the ability to outplay your opponent by the speed of your play around the table and the pace of your shots. Speed of shot choice also comes into play in these situations.

We will explore exercises to improve your speed in the following chapters.

Flexibility: Stretching your muscles regularly keeps your body flexible. It is important to focus on your neck and shoulders, waist, arms, thighs, calves and ankles. Stretching prior to a match can be the difference between winning or losing the first 5 points as it gets rid of tension, calms you down and enhances your concentration, helps in injury avoidance and allows you to move faster as your muscles are warm. These should be a mixture of dynamic and passive stretches.

Co-ordination and balance: Better co-ordination will come as a result of improved stamina, strength, speed and flexibility. This coupled with technical practice will improve balance and timing on shots as you will have more time to get into position to play the type of shot you want and be better able to get into position to receive the return should it come back.

Improvements in any one area can lead to improvements in your game play but combined can make the difference between winning and losing a match and increase the chance of injury avoidance.

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How to assess and monitor your fitness level

Introduction:

Whatever your fitness goals, it is important to regularly test your current fitness level and monitor your improvement over time. Fitness testing is not just for elite athletes but for anyone who is involved with fitness or sports activities. Fitness training can be done simply at home and does not require a lot of fancy gym equipment.

When first embarking on any kind of fitness programme, you should complete an initial fitness test assessment to find out your baseline level, noting any muscular imbalances in your frame. The initial test should be followed up at regular intervals to monitor improvements and highlight any continuing areas of weakness that need further development. This will enable you to make the necessary adjustments required to ensure progress is maintained.

Fitness testing is also a useful form of motivation as the incentive to improve can be provided by reaching goals or passing certain test scores or ratings.

How to perform the initial baseline test:

Warm up before starting the testing process. Your warm up should include some general exercise such as a short jog or star jumps to get the blood pumping, followed by some stretching exercises specific to the areas being tested.

The following programme tests 10 specific areas and can be re-taken on a monthly basis to check progress. You should record your results to note progress over time.

The baseline test includes the following elements:

1. Resting heart rate
2. Body size and composition
3. Flexibility
4. Balance
5. Core strength
6. Lower body strength
7. Upper body strength
8. Leg power
9. Speed and agility
10. Endurance

For details on each element of the test [buy the book to continue reading:](#)

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How fit do I need to be to play Table Tennis

The level of fitness required to play table tennis depends on what level you are hoping to achieve at the game and your playing style. For the purpose of this discussion, I will breakdown the playing standards into 3 categories:

1. The hobby player
2. Good club/tournament player
3. International player

The hobby player

If you enjoy playing table tennis in school, in a club or at home but do not have any real ambition to play competitions or leagues as you simply want to play for fun, then it is not necessary to be extremely fit to play. A decent level of general fitness is of course desirable to allow you to move around the table and to play for as long as you like without getting tired or injured. I would still recommend a gentle stretching session before you play to avoid any pulled muscles or niggles. No fitness programme would be necessary for you to enjoy table tennis as a recreational hobby.

The good club/tournament player

To play at a good level in the game and to compete in tournaments and leagues does require a good level of fitness, if you wish to attain your optimum level. As mentioned in Chapter One, the main areas of fitness that players need to focus on are stamina, strength, speed, flexibility, balance and co-ordination. However, if you are playing at this level of the game, you are not a full-time professional, so juggling work/study, family and other commitments with your table tennis can mean you do not have as much time to devote to your fitness training as you might like. Lots of players have time constraints and prefer to focus on their on-table training when time allows and hence fitness training can be somewhat neglected.

So what areas of fitness should you focus on when time allows? I would suggest most important are stamina, speed and flexibility. A good general level of fitness is important so that you do not get tired at the end of a long match – the last thing you want is to lose a game because you run out of steam towards the end. It is therefore important to keep your general fitness up – at least one run, cycle or swim of 20 minutes a week is enough to maintain a reasonable level of general fitness when combined with other fitness activities such as playing the sport.

As table tennis is a game of short, fast bursts of intensity, it is important to have a good level of speed in your game to allow you to move quickly around the table to get into position for your shots and to get to balls that may take you by surprise. The ability to get into the right position quickly is a major advantage as it gives you more time on the ball which increases accuracy and improves shot choice.

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Finally flexibility is important both to reduce the risk of injury and to allow you gain an advantage at the start of the match. Stretching (both passive and active) on a regular basis keeps your body flexible. Active stretching prior to a match can make the difference between winning or losing the first 5 points as it reduces tension, enhances your concentration, and may help in injury avoidance, it will also allow you to move faster as your muscles are warm.

The International Player

In order to play table tennis at international level and to be able to compete consistently at this level requires a very high level of fitness. For those players who are lucky enough to play full-time, their training plans will include a lot of fitness work focusing on stamina, speed, strength, flexibility, balance and co-ordination. These players may also have the luxury of access to the best equipment and to a fitness coach who will monitor and record their fitness levels and adjust their training programmes to ensure progression. These plans would typically include building phases to maintain and develop all round physical and event specific fitness, sharpening phases building towards tournaments and incorporate down time to ward off staleness, to maintain enthusiasm and keep that competitive edge.

There are however some International players who are not full-timers and who still need to juggle their training with work and other commitments. I was one such player. I played at International level for 13 years of my career, competing in several World and European Championships. I knew I was never going to be able to compete with the best in the game because I was only playing part-time and the time I could devote to on-table and fitness training was a lot less than most of my opponents at major championships. I did my best however to use the training time I had as efficiently and effectively as possible by including stamina, speed and stretching for flexibility into these sessions as well as combining on-table and fitness training in the form of multi-ball and shadow play sessions. Finding creative ways to make your training time more efficient is essential if you are to reach your full potential as a part-time player.

In the next chapter on fitness plans, I will offer some examples of exercises that can be done to improve all aspects of fitness, both general and event specific.



About the Authors



Tara Fusco was born and lived all her young life in Dun Laoghaire Co. Dublin. She is married with two children and lives with her husband Eugene and family in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Tara is an ex Irish International table tennis player, who represented Ireland at 5 World Championships and 7 European Championships during her 13 year International career. She played in Germany on a semi-professional basis between 2006 and 2009 and has won every domestic tournament in Ireland including the National singles championship on two occasions.

Tara has been a Level 2 Table Tennis Coach for over 25 years and has many years of experience coaching in clubs, schools and at International level. Tara continues to play to a high level representing Dun Laoire Table Tennis Club in the Women's British League.

Tara has collaborated with her husband Eugene, an ex International Athlete, coach and competitive table tennis player to compile this reference guide drawing on the world of fitness training from many fields for the benefit of aspiring table tennis players of all standards and aspirations.

The latest in this Master Class series of E-Books, “**Training and Fitness for Table Tennis**” is the fifth in the series.

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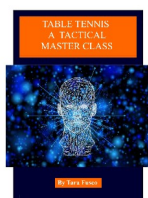
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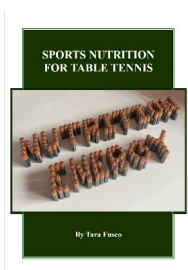
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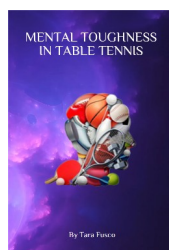
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