

Your Health

Squash - the Healthiest Sport

Neal Santelmann

It is ironic that in an imperfect world few things are more flawed with inefficiencies, inconsistencies and injury risks than the pursuit of fitness.

Old manners of getting in shape seem to us today as antiquated and inefficient as using Indian clubs and medicine balls. While racking up several miles on the nearby track or jogging trail may be great for cardiorespiratory health, it does nothing for the upper body and can wreak havoc upon joints. Weight training may promote muscular strength, but it has a limited effect on the most important muscle of all, the heart. And while swimming seems to be everyone's ideal activity for the total-body workout, it won't melt many calories without hard-won and proper technique, and is worthless for anyone who lacks ready access to a pool.

Given such hassles, is it any wonder that, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported, some 70% of Americans don't engage in regular exercise? Well, frankly, yes, especially when one considers the benefits of even blatantly moderate physical pursuits such as walking or gardening, which have been found to alleviate depression, decrease weight, strengthen bones and reduce the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, colon cancer and premature death.

While that's all well and good for recovering couch potatoes, what about those gym rats who seem to spend endless hours doing sit-ups and step-classes? Alas, in some ways they're wasting their time, because besides getting one ripped there's little difference between the long-term health benefits of moderate and intense physical activity. "A lot of the argument for intense exercise is about cosmetics," notes Carl Foster, a professor of exercise physiology at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. "If you're trying to lose weight, mild exercise is not as good as vigorous. That's fine if you want to look better, but from a long-term health and longevity standpoint it's unimportant."

Fair enough. But as anyone who has ever glanced around the departure lounge at a Midwestern airport knows, "health" and "fitness" are two different things. The former has to do with reducing the risk of disease, while the latter is about maximizing the four basic physiological components of fitness: cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance and flexibility.

Of course, one can be healthy without being fit, and vice versa. But while the out-of-shape middle managers you see huffing and puffing toward the departure gate may be able to reach their life expectancy, they're going to be a helluva lot less comfortable getting there than those who strive to maintain peak physical condition along the way.

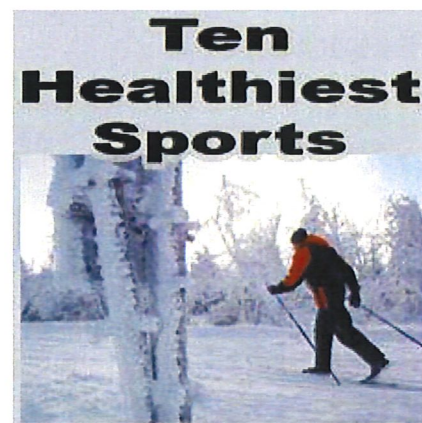
For anyone who would prefer to be among of the latter, we've compiled a list of the Ten Healthiest Sports--a bit of a misnomer, perhaps, but you get the idea. Best pursued with calculated abandon to reduce their risk of injury, as well as in cross-training combinations to cover all of the basic physiological components, each of these sporting activities is a great way to get you fit--and keep you there.

Rating Methodology

Ratings are based upon consultations with fitness experts--coaches, personal trainers, competitors and exercise physiologists--as well as a dash of personal experience. The four basic physiological components of fitness are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "excellent," 4 being "darn good," 3 being "good," 2 being "not bad" and 1 being "nothing special."

Injury risk is rated on a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being "low," 2 being "so-so" and 1 being "high." Calorie burn (in parentheses) is based upon the energy expenditure of a 190-pound person over 30 minutes and is rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being 450+ calories, 4 being 400-450 calories, 3 being 350-400 calories, 2 being 300-350 calories and 1 being 250-300 calories. Calorie burn rates are from the American College of Sports Medicine; whenever possible, we selected the rate for "moderate" or similar intensity.

Scores were tallied to arrive at an individual rating for each sport. Of course, physiological benefits, injury risks and calorie burn can vary widely depending upon the technique, vigor, care and enthusiasm with which you pursue the sport.



Number 1: SQUASH



- 1) Cardiorespiratory Endurance: **4.5**
- 2) Muscular Strength: **3**
- 3) Muscular Endurance: **5**
- 4) Flexibility: **3**
- 5) Calories/30 minutes (517): **5**
- 6) Injury Risk: **2**

**OVERALL SCORE:
22.5**

The preferred game of Wall Street has convenience on its side, as 30 minutes on the squash court provides an impressive cardiorespiratory workout. Extended rallies and almost constant running builds muscular strength and endurance in the lower body, while lunges, twists and turns increase flexibility in the back and abdomen.

"For people just getting into the game, it's almost too much to sustain, but once you get there, squash is tremendous," says Paul Assaiante, head coach of the five-time defending national intercollegiate champion men's squash team at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn. Assaiante recommends a regimen of yoga, sprinting and distance running for preparation. Be wary of groin pulls, torn Achilles tendons and your opponent's racquet.

Number 2: ROWING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 4.5
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 3.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 5.0
6. Injury/risk 2.0

Overall score: 22.5

Number 5: CROSS COUNTRY SKIING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 5.0
2. Muscular strength 3.5
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 3.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 2.0
6. Injury/risk 2.0

Overall score: 20.5

Number 8: RUNNING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 5.0
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 4.0
4. Flexibility 1.5
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 4.0
6. Injury/risk 1.0

Overall score: 18.5

Number 3: ROCK CLIMBING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 1.0
2. Muscular strength 5.0
3. Muscular endurance 4.0
4. Flexibility 5.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 5.0
6. Injury/risk 2.0

Overall score: 22.0

Number 6: BASKETBALL

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 4.0
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 4.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 2.0
6. Injury/risk 1.0

Overall score: 19.0

Number 9: MODERN PENTATHLON

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 4.5
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 3.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 1.0
6. Injury/risk 2.0

Overall score: 18.5

Number 4: SWIMMING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 4.75
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 3.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 2.0
6. Injury/risk 3.0

Overall score: 20.75

Number 7: CYCLING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 5.0
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 4.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 4.0
6. Injury/risk 1.0

Overall score: 19.0

Number 10: BOXING

1. Cardio respiratory endurance 3.5
2. Muscular strength 3.0
3. Muscular endurance 5.0
4. Flexibility 2.0
5. Calories/30 minutes (517) 2.0
6. Injury/risk 2.0

Overall score: 17.5