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Courting a workout

Improving your game is just an extra benefit of Cardio Tennis, an intense hour of heart-pounding exercise

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EXERCISE CLASS OF THE MONTH

Jayne Rodriguez, 31, wants to get back in shape after having a baby in April. Darrell Meeks, almost 65, likes the idea of lowering his blood pressure without medication. Laura Stein, 41, is interested in getting her heart rate up quickly and keeping it there, and Richard King, 31, likes exercise that keeps him moving.

All of these people also want to improve their tennis games. Their exercise solution? Cardio Tennis.

What is Cardio Tennis?

Introduced to the public during breaks at the U.S. Open in August 2005, Cardio Tennis is a group exercise that combines hitting tennis balls with running fast-paced drills that keep players panting and heart rates up. It is a form of interval training with short periods of high-intensity exercise (running forward, lunging, changing directions, running backward and going after every ball), interspersed with very short periods of rest.

At a recent Saturday morning class at the Texas Christian University Tennis Center, participants marched with knees pulled high to their chests, took long lunges back and forth across the court, and took turns running to the net, hitting a flying ball over to a target basket and quickly shuffling backward to the center of the court -- and that was all just to get their muscles warmed up.

Isn't traditional tennis good exercise?

Traditional tennis is fun at any level and a great way to stay fit for more advanced players, but the truth is, a lot of beginners and even intermediate players do not play aggressively enough to keep their heart rates up and get the full benefits of great exercise, says Ken Brown, adult coordinator at the Texas Christian University Tennis Center.

Cardio Tennis kicks up the pace and gives players of all levels a worthy workout, complete with pounding hearts and lots of sweat.

"They get their heart rates up to their aerobic training zones and pretty much stay there," Brown says.

What is an "aerobic training zone"?

Your aerobic training zone is 70 percent to 80 percent of your maximum heart rate, which is calculated by subtracting your age from 220 (226 for women). Exercising in the aerobic zone increases the size and strength of your heart and burns more calories than less-intense exercise.

Your aerobic training zone can be calculated more precisely with more complex formulas or through a treadmill stress test administered by a healthcare professional. It is important for improving fitness and losing weight.

Who's Cardio Tennis for?

Cardio Tennis is more about cardiovascular conditioning than playing tennis. Emphasis is on movement, not style and not even very much about getting the ball back across the net, in bounds. People who like it really like it and keep coming back, but a lot don't because it is very fast-paced. Emphasis is more on getting a good workout than improving your tennis game.

Where to find a class

Drop in for the 10 a.m. Saturday class at TCU, where hourlong group lessons are \$12 and open to the public. No membership required.

While many classes have been canceled in recent weeks because of rain and some classes have recessed for the summer, Cardio Tennis is also offered at Arlington Tennis Center, Lifetime Fitness Center in Colleyville, The Lakes Sports Club in Grapevine, Richland Tennis Center in North Richland Hills and Southlake Tennis Center in Southlake.

For more information, go to www.cardiotennis.com

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