

The olympics for the rest of us: How ping-pong can help your brain

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The physical benefits of the Olympic sports are pretty obvious: strength, endurance and agility, to name a few. But did you know they also can help the brain?

Provided by Mayo Clinic

[Mayo Clinic](#) research shows that any exercise that gets the heart pumping may reduce the risk of [dementia](#) and [mild cognitive impairment](#) - and slow those conditions if they start. Aerobic exercise also can boost your mood.

Running and swimming, two of the Olympic sports most popular with fitness buffs and TV viewers alike, each provide excellent aerobic workouts. Swimming has the added benefit of taking it easy on the joints. Basketball, cycling, football, hockey, handball, race walking and tennis also provide vigorous aerobic exercise. Here are other Olympic sports that can serve as brain boosters:

- Ping-pong, also known as table tennis
- Badminton
- Taekwondo
- Fencing
- Rowing
- Canoeing

Fast-paced sessions of badminton, ping-pong, taekwondo and fencing all require concentration, hand-eye coordination and precision, but that's not why they can help keep the brain sharp. All also put participants on the move, providing valuable aerobic activity. Rowing and canoeing - particularly if the water is choppy or the pace is brisk - also provide great cardiovascular workouts that can benefit the [brain](#).

"We know that 30 minutes of aerobic activity of any kind five times per week is associated with a reduced risk of cognitive decline. So it is important to stay active often and as early as you can," says Rodolfo Savica, M.D., a Mayo Clinic neurologist. "And if the Olympic Games push people to get active, we definitely endorse that."

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