

The pickle BOOM is here - but so are the injuries; how to safely prepare for pickle ball participation

So,

You think pickleball would be a great way to get in shape?

You think pickleball is slower than tennis, so it's safe, especially for the mature population?

You think the best way to get ready for pickleball is just to play pickleball?

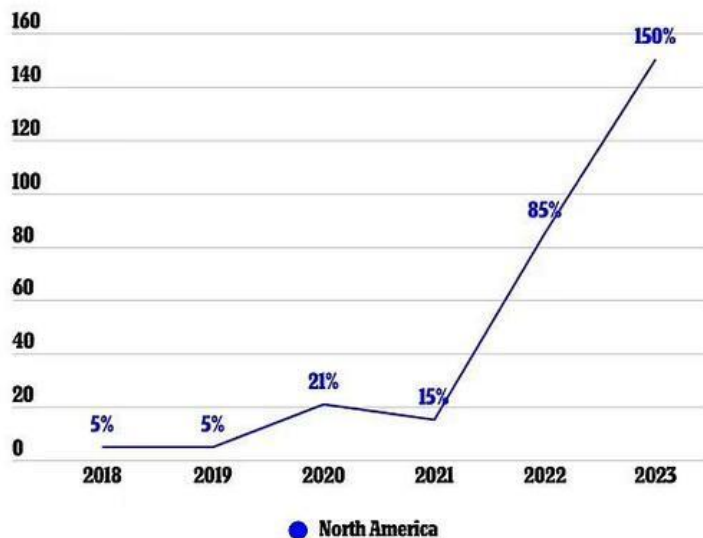
Well – NOT SO FAST. Read on!

If you live in Florida and love pickleball, you are in the right place. Naples, Florida, is, in fact, the Pickleball capital of the world, hosting the largest pickleball championship in North America, the Minto US OPEN Pickleball Championships (sponsored by Margaritaville). Collier County, where cities like Marco Island and Naples are located, has made a significant investment in expanding its public facilities serving the pickleball community. Of course, surrounding counties are taking note of the pickleball fever and developing more facilities for the increasing number of people interested in picking up this relatively new 'professional' sport. A prime example of this is Fort Lauderdale's the FORT. The FORT will be the world's first pickleball stadium, boasting a 4,000 sq. ft. event space, 43 professional courts, 14 weatherproof courts, live music, and food and drinks.



All of this excitement has fueled pickleball's growth. The figure below shows the explosion in pickleball participation over the last 6 years.

Pickleball Growth Rate



Source: Sports & Fitness Industry Associate, UBS Research

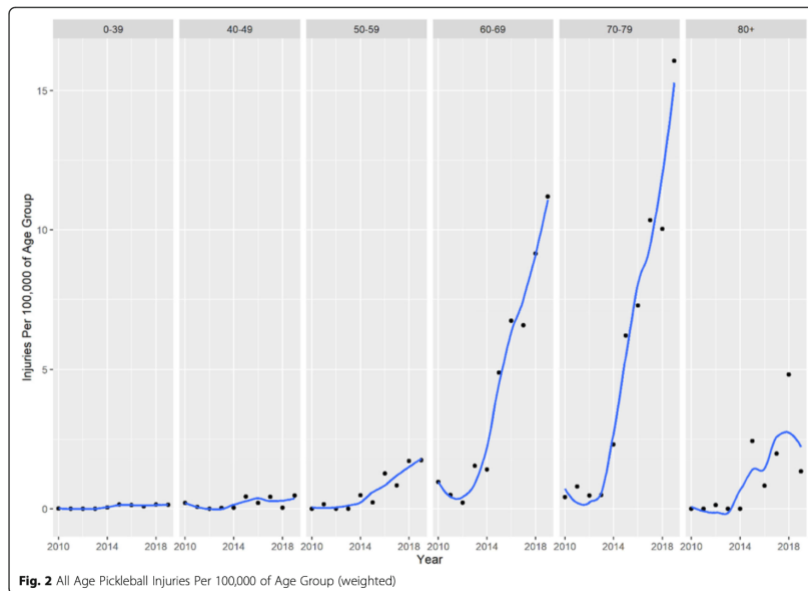
The growth of pickleball has not come without its drawbacks. According to a UBS study (1), projections for 2023 estimate up to \$500 million in medical costs due to pickleball injuries. Even though pickleball will continue to grow, so will the alarming rate of injuries, especially among older players who may not be physically ready to safely participate in the sport. Here are some of the alarming numbers directly linked to pickleball-related injuries.

- Approximately 22 million players by the end of 2023, representing a 148% increase.
- 67,000 emergency room visits,
- 366,000 outpatient visits, and
- 9,000 surgeries
- 86% of ER visits related to pickleball injuries were by senior citizens.
- From 2010-2019, 86% of ER pickleball visits occurred in people > 60 years old
- Sprains, strains, and fractures account for 60% of all pickleball-related injuries.

WHY is this happening?

Obviously, the more participation you have, the more injuries you will have. However, there is also a false sense of security when it comes to the game of pickleball. Many people think that to get in shape to play a sport, you simply play the sport; starting easy and gradually progressing to full speed. Although that sounds like a logical sequence, few people can gauge that progression perfectly. Most people don't understand that any sport that requires an immediate reaction to a stimulus, fast acceleration, fast deceleration, and changes of direction puts an enormous strain on the various soft tissues of the body. If you have not done any physical activity requiring these movement parameters, you will most likely not be prepared for them, and this is probably the number one cause of all injuries: lack of adequate preparation. This is especially true for people

in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, who have not participated in sports or activities that require fast reaction times in the last few years or months. As you can see from the graph below, this is the age group that really suffers the most injuries from pickleball.



It's hard to control the natural urge to compete and get to a low shot in time to make the play. This is especially true when the competitive nature of most players kicks into gear. The best way to avoid the types of injuries we are seeing in pickleball is to prepare for them through specific strength and conditioning. Not only is strength needed, but specific fast and reactive power is essential for safe and effective athletic participation in pickleball.

How to improve pickleball and reduce the likelihood of injuries

The base of any strength and conditioning program could be developed through traditional strength exercises, including barbell, dumbbell, and machine exercises working on the major muscle groups. However, if you want the training to really transfer to any activity, more specific exercises are needed. To use and abuse the term, 'Functional Training' for pickleball will provide the greatest performance transfer and injury prevention in preparation for the sport. So, what does this look like? It looks like this!!

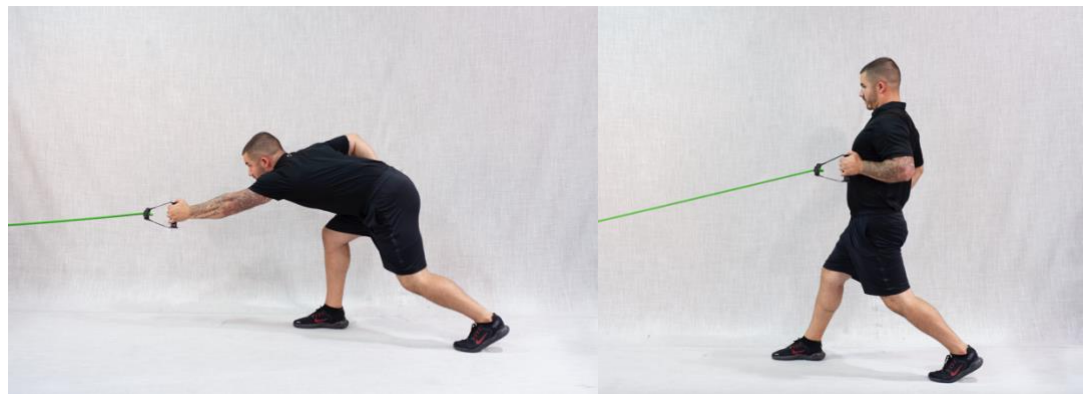
To improve this!



Don't only do this!



Do this at IHP !



The IHP training system was created as a hybrid model of training that offers the best of traditional strength training and specificity of Functional Training. It begins with basic strength development for all major muscle groups used in pickleball. Then, it incorporates specific Pickleball positions to elicit maximal transfer to the game. Finally, after establishing a base, we introduce faster moves to increase the power capacity of the body in the injury-related positions and actions of pickleball.

This approach to training has proven highly effective in preventing injuries specific to pickleball.

Sprained Ankle:

One of the most common injuries in pickleball is a sprained ankle. The quick lateral movements, sudden stops, and changes in direction put a load on the ankles, making them susceptible to injuries. The [IHP pickleball performance program](#) teaches the ankle how to communicate with the knee and hip to maintain a stable and aligned position, increasing range of motion and strength.

Sprained Wrists and Elbows:

Tennis elbow, or lateral epicondylitis, is another common racket sport injury resulting from overusing the wrist in the racket swing. The [IHP pickleball performance program](#) emphasizes synchronizing the racket swing, minimizing the wrist's workload. Various gripping and

functional exercises naturally strengthen grip strength, forearm positioning, and enhance the upper arm's connection to the shoulder.

Shoulder Injuries:

Overhead serves and smashes can put the shoulder in a vulnerable position, increasing the risk of injury. The [IHP pickleball performance program](#) focuses on strengthening shoulder mobility and stability while teaching the proper position during power transfer between the core and the shoulder joint. These exercises reduce the risk of injuries to the entire shoulder complex.

Lower Back Pain:

The dynamic movements in pickleball, especially low volley positions, contribute to lower back strain. [The IHP pickleball performance program](#) targets lower back and total core function, facilitating the transfer of strength from the legs to the shoulders and ultimately the racket. Training emphasizes core stiffness to protect the entire spinal column, enhancing performance and reducing lower back injuries.

Knee Strains:

Sudden decelerations on a single leg often result in knee strains and injuries. [The IHP pickleball performance program](#) addresses this specific muscle action using exercises that mimic the loading parameters of the low volley position. These exercises improve the strength and flexibility of the muscles around the knee, providing better support to the knee joint and reducing the risk of strains and overuse injuries.

Hamstring Strains:

Common in any locomotive sport, hamstring injuries are addressed by the [IHP pickleball performance program](#) through specific exercises that replicate the hamstring's actions in pickleball. Dynamic exercises enhance hamstring flexibility and strength, making them more resilient to injury and improving athletic ability on the pickleball court.

Achilles Tendonitis and Plantar Fasciitis:

Fast-moving sports often lead to Achilles tendonitis and plantar fasciitis. [The IHP pickleball performance program](#) addresses these conditions by teaching the ankle how to transfer forces and specific angles. This unique approach helps prevent excessive strain on the Achilles tendon and related issues.

The [IHP pickleball performance program](#) isn't just for athletes seeking to enhance on-court performance; it's also an effective way to prevent injuries or rehabilitate from them. Investing in a personalized training program with a qualified and experienced IHP Performance coach supports your pickleball journey, aiming to improve flexibility, strength, endurance, posture, stability, balance, and mental resilience. With the guidance of our highly trained coaches, you can optimize your playing potential, reduce the risk of injuries, and enjoy the game with greater longevity and enthusiasm.

We strongly encourage you to incorporate the [IHP pickleball performance program](#) into your routine, whether you're a beginner or a seasoned pro. If you're in the Boca Raton area, our performance team at IHP is ready to help you play your best pickleball and reduce the likelihood of injuries.

References

Weiss H, Dougherty J, DiMaggio C. Non-fatal senior pickleball and tennis-related injuries treated in United States emergency departments, 2010-2019. *Inj Epidemiol.* 2021 May 3;8(1):34. doi: 10.1186/s40621-021-00327-9. PMID: 33934725; PMCID: PMC8091689.