

Getting started: A beginner's equipment checklist

Pack your gym bag, we're off to play tennis! None of the items below need to be brand new or even top of the line; but of course as you up your game, feel free to reward yourself by upgrading your gear!

1. **Racquet** – You will definitely need a racquet! If you're a beginner, it's recommended that you choose a racquet with a wider head; the wider the head the less likely you are to miss the ball (but, no sweat, nor judgment, if you do miss it!) If you're looking for a challenge, a narrower head offers more power and accuracy.
2. **Tennis Balls** – Bagged, boxed, canned, or stolen from the neighbour's dog, there's a wide selection of tennis balls to choose from. The only thing you don't want when it comes to a tennis ball is a "dead" ball. How do you know if you have a dead ball? Hold the ball up as high as your head and then drop it. If the ball bounce doesn't reach your waistline the ball is "dead" and you should return it to the neighbour's dog.
3. **Sneakers** – Tennis requires a fair amount of quick running and sudden stopping which is why tennis shoes are specifically designed to be a little more flat and sturdy than your average running shoe. Best practice when picking the right shoe: go for comfort. Also, if you are thinking of joining a tennis club, look for a shoe that has a no-marking sole. This way when you play indoors the only mark you will be leaving behind is the mark of a fantastic tennis player!
4. **Breathable clothing** – You thought you sweat a lot last week at hot yoga? Think again! Okay, perhaps we exaggerate a little on what to expect, but do note that tennis is definitely a workout and requires a pair of athletic shorts (or a tennis skirt) and a t-shirt.
5. **Water bottle** – Stay hydrated.

Get a grip! How to hold your new racquet

Finding a grip that's right for you will come naturally as you become more comfortable with your racquet. But, tennis pros recommend you kick-start your spiritual grip journey with the Eastern Grip. It's extra-comfortable, versatile, and will definitely impress your tennis teacher if mastered before your first lesson. Here's how to get it:

1. Holding the racquet in front of you in your non-dominant hand (if you're right-handed this would be your left-hand and vice-versa), turn the racquet so its face is perpendicular with the ground. (The face of a racquet is the oval-shaped part with the strings!)
2. Place the palm of your dominant hand on the face of the racquet (on the strings) and then move your palm towards your body, down the neck of racquet, and stop when you hit the end of the handle.

3. Wrap your fingers around the handle. The crease of your hand between your thumb and your forefinger should create a V that points towards your dominant shoulder.
4. If you just messed it up, place your racquet flat on the ground, now pick it up with your dominant hand. That should do it for now!

Stroke of genius: How to use your new racquet

Now that you're comfortably holding your racquet, let's hit some balls! Here's a list of basic strokes that will leave you ready to rally. (A rally is a sequence of continuous shots between players.)

Forehand: A forehand is when you hit the ball on your dominant side.

How? Pivot your feet and turn your hips and shoulders towards your dominant side, pull your racquet back and swing forward from low to high following through over your opposite shoulder

Pro-tip: The ball goes wherever the racquet face is 'looking' so make sure it faces the target for the length of the stroke.

Backhand: A backhand is when you hit the ball on your non-dominant side.

How? Pivot your feet and turn your hips and shoulders towards your non-dominant side, pull your racquet back with one or two hands on the racquet and swing forward from low to high following through over your opposite shoulder.

Pro-tip: Avoid snapping your wrists with your strokes and instead drive through the ball with your body weight.

Volley: A volley is a short and quick shot hit before the ball bounces on the ground. It is most often hit from the net, but can be hit from anywhere on the court.

How? Keep your feet shoulder width apart, stand about three feet from the net and hit the ball prior to it hitting the ground.

Pro-tip: Stay on the balls of your feet and make small rapid steps! Playing the net requires a lot of agility and quick reflexes. Also, avoid swinging your racquet. A volley does not require a full follow-through. It's more like a punch or even a light tap.

Serve: A serve is the overhead tennis shot to start a point. (Beginners note: It's more common to serve overhead, but underhand is just fine!)

How? Lightly toss the ball into the air, and then extend your racquet overhead and hit the ball when it reaches its highest point. Be cautious of where your feet are. You want to keep them behind the baseline.

Pro-tip: Lightly toss the tennis ball and raise your racquet above your head at the same time. As the ball is rising drop your racquet behind you as if you are going to scratch your back with it and then extend it fully above your head and hit the ball. Don't forget to follow through!

Mastering The Court: Understanding your new domain

Practicing solo against a brick wall to perfect your form can be fun not to mention beneficial to your game, but there's nothing quite like grabbing a friend or three for a singles or doubles match on a proper tennis court. First-timer? Here's all you need to know:

1. **The surface:** Court surfaces can vary – for instance, Wimbledon is played on grass, the French Open is played on clay, and Rogers Cup presented by National Bank is played on hard courts – but the lines of the court are always the same and in Canada, hard courts are most common.
2. **The lines:** A symmetrical rectangle, a tennis court has two baselines, four service courts (the two spaces in front of each side of the net where a successful serve must land) and two sidelines down either side. For a singles match (2 people), you will use the inner sideline as a boundary line and for a doubles match (4 people), you will use the outer sideline as a boundary line. Simply, if the ball bounces outside the baselines or sidelines, or outside the service courts during a serve, consider it out of play.
3. **The net:** Every court has one and it's usually about 3.5 feet high at the posts and 3 feet high in the middle. Try not to touch it with your racquet and always be sure to walk up to it when you're finished playing to shake your opponents hand and say, "Good match!"
4. **Court placement:** After a few days of hitting the ball back and forth, you'll start to notice you have the ability to place the ball (whether it's on purpose or by accident, just go with it!) If you hit the ball diagonally from one corner of the court to the other, you can pat yourself on the back for a fine "crosscourt" shot. In the case that you hit the ball and it goes down the sideline of the same side you hit the ball from, you can pat yourself on the back again, this time for a fine shot "down the line," the harder of the two shots.
5. **The court beside you:** More often than not there is going to be a court beside you. One of the number one rules in tennis is to be courteous. If you have a question, comment, concern, or one of your neighbouring court's tennis balls, wait until they have completed playing their point to initiate contact.

Getting Points: How to ensure your bragging rights!

We know you're playing for the fun and the love of the game, but if you *insist* on keeping track of points during your rallies here's how to get them:

1. If a ball is hit and it lands on or inside all of the boundary lines and is not returned, that's a point for the person that hit it!
2. If a ball bounces twice within all of the boundary lines before it is returned, that's a point for the person that hit it!
3. If a ball is served and it bounces within the service box boundary lines and is not successfully returned, that's a point for the person that served it!
4. Better, if a ball is served and it bounces within the service box boundary lines and is not touched at all, it's called an "Ace" and you are automatically entitled to one week of bragging rights.
5. If a ball is hit into the net, that's a point for the person who didn't hit it. Don't worry, it happens to absolutely everyone!
6. If your opponent "double faults" (we will get to that) on their serve, that's a point for you. But don't get too excited, you're serving next game!
7. If your racquet at any point hits the net, that's a point for your opponent.
8. If the ball hits the net during a point but still falls over and in on the other side, consider yourself lucky as the person who hit it gets the point. But as it's often considered a "lucky bounce", be a good sportsman and accept the point graciously by giving your opponent a quick apology!

Game, Set, Match: How to play a match!

We love the game, and we are sure you're going to love the game, but the truth is, love means nothing when it comes to tennis. Depressed or discouraged? Don't be! You can still end up with a perfect match!

1. **Game:** Games are scored starting at "love". From there the first point is called 15, the second point 30, and the third point 40. After 40 comes the game point. The tricky thing about the game point is you have to win by two. So, if it is tied 40 / 40, which is also referred to as "deuce", the next person to win a point receives an "Advantage". If it is the server's point it's called "Ad-in" and if it's the receiver's point, it's "Ad-out". If the player with the advantage wins the next point they win the game. If they lose the next point it goes back to "Deuce". We know what you're thinking, that could go on forever! And you're right. The longest recorded tennis match lasted just over 11 hours and was played over three days.
2. **Set:** Sets are made up of games and the first player to win six games wins the set. However, like games, you have to win a set by 2. If the set score is 6 to 5 the player with the lead must win the next game to win the set. However, if they lose and the set score becomes tied at 6 – 6 we introduce to you the tiebreak!

3. **Tiebreak:** To keep score for a tiebreak retire the 15, 30, 40, game point progression and simply count each point by one starting at one. Example, if you win five points in a row the score would be 5-0. Typically a tiebreak game continues until one player wins seven points by two or more. If it is your turn to serve you will serve the first point of the tiebreak from the right-hand side of the court. This side of the court is called the “deuce” side. Your opponent will then serve the next two points, starting their serve on the left-hand side of the court. This side of the court is called the “advantage” side. Their second serve will be from the deuce side, and then you will serve the next two as they did, and so on. Pro-tip: Before starting a tiebreak, fill up your water bottle!
4. **Match:** A match is made up of an odd number of sets. At the major tournaments, men’s single and doubles matches usually consist of up to five sets (winner being the first to take the majority) and women’s singles the best of three sets (again, the winner being the first to take the majority.)

A+ Service: Game on, your serve!

When it comes to professional tennis, a good serve is very important and is commonly considered a “game changer.” For instance, quite often the player that is serving the game is expected to win the game. When this doesn’t happen it’s called, “breaking serve” and the crowd usually gasps a little. As the first shot of the game, here’s how serving works:

1. To start off any game, one player serves from the deuce (right) side of the court behind the baseline with the hopes to hit the ball crosscourt into the service box on the other side of the net.
2. This same player (the server) then serves the entire game (not match) alternating from the deuce side to the advantage side of the court point to point.
3. After each player has served an entire game from their respective sides, it’s time to switch ends of the court.
4. Hit the net? Good news. You get two chances! If your first serve hits the net, bounces out of bounds, or lands in bounds but on the court next to you (it happens!) this is called a “fault” and you get another try. If you do the same thing on your second attempt (this happens often, too) this is called a “double fault” and your opponent is awarded a point.
5. If your ball happens to graze the top of the net, but still lands in-bounds crosscourt this is called a “let.” This is not considered a fault, nor a valid serve and is perhaps best described as a, “let’s just pretend it never happened.”

That’s it! Your serve!