

2017 National Senior Games Full of Passion and Gutsy Play!

By John M. Sigle DPM, FACFAS

Holy Mackerel! Birmingham, Alabama was buzzing with excitement this past month as it hosted the 2017 National Senior Games. Over 10,000 senior athletes from all over the country, ages 50 and older, competed in 18 to 20 multi-sport events such as tennis, pickleball, basketball, racquetball, volleyball, softball, swimming, golf, track and field, table tennis, archery, bowling, cycling, badminton, bowling, walk and run races, softball, shuffleboard, and horseshoes. Over 15,000 visitors, mostly consisting of family, friends, and fans, also attended the 14-day event and added to the excitement.

Most participants were life-long athletes who had a passion for their sport and competition. Each athlete had a personal reason for competing. For some, it was a life changer and personal affirmation to live a healthier lifestyle. For others, it was a motivation to continue their sport despite having major physical limitations. Some were cancer survivors. Some had pacemakers and total knee or hip replacements. Some had major surgery on their feet and ankles, knees, hips, shoulder, and back.



Pekin, Illinois resident Gary Garver, shattered myths about returning to competitive tennis after having spine surgery this past winter, winning a gold medal in Men's Doubles Tennis with teammate Scott Aikman of Danville, Illinois. According to Garver, "after surgery, I decided to compete when my surgeon gave me the okay. I thought it would be a long shot, but I had no expectation other than to enjoy the competition and have fun!"

Most senior athletes are not going to quit until they have to. They have all seem to have the philosophy that, "it ain't over 'til it's over." Perhaps age is a state of mind, but Father Time reduces muscle strength, reflexes, agility, speed, and energy. Consequently, proper conditioning, physical modifications, and fitness gear become critical to reduce the chance of injury.



Senior athletes susceptible to foot problems

During the summer months, athletic and recreational programs are in full swing. Despite the differences among the sports, all participants are susceptible to foot and ankle problems. Here are some of the more common questions my patients ask and helpful tips to prevent foot and ankle injuries during tennis and pickleball, golf, and running.

Tennis and pickleball

Tennis and pickleball are particularly stressful on your feet because of the quick starts and stops and lateral movements from side to side. Common foot problems include ankle sprains, stress fractures, plantar fasciitis, and tennis toe.

- **Injury prevention tips**

If you have weak ankles or a history of sprains, wear a simple ankle brace inside your shoe. Select a stable tennis shoe that is not too rigid and provides flexibility to perform. The shoe should provide durable toe support. Custom orthotics are recommended to provide arch and joint support. Proper warm-up and stretching are also important. These actions will help flexibility, relieve foot pain, and extend playing time.

Golf

Golf is stressful on your feet and ankles because of excessive walking up and down hills. Common problems for golfers include tendonitis, capsulitis, and ligament sprains and pulls that keep the golf enthusiasts off the greens. Improper shoes can also cause blisters and neuromas, and other foot and ankle pain.



• **Injury prevention tips**

Walking up and down hills is a normal motion that puts abnormal stress on your Achilles tendon. Walking on uneven surfaces puts a lot of strain on the tendons along the outer portion of the ankle. If you don't stretch beforehand, you will put a lot of wear and tear on your muscles that may lead to severe tendonitis. If you use arch supports in your shoes, you will be surprised how much better your feet feel at the end of a round of golf.

Running

Gravity tends to come into play more during running and a considerable more stress is placed on your feet. The 26 bones, 33 joints, 112 ligaments, and network of tendons, nerves, and blood vessels all work together in the foot while running and take on maximum stress. Common foot problems that occur are blisters, corns, calluses, Athlete's foot, shin splints, Achilles tendonitis, and plantar fasciitis.

• **Injury prevention tips**

Runners should properly condition their body, build a routine, and stretch their muscles, tendons, and ligaments before and after each run. Proper running shoes are critical. Shoes should provide flexibility in the right places to help with shock absorption. More rigidity is needed in the middle of the foot. The heel should sit low in the shoe and the cushioned sole should be slightly wider than a walking shoe to absorb impact. Custom orthotics will reduce stress on lower extremities and allow you to run with less fatigue. Keep your feet powdered and dry and wear clean socks. Shoes hold moisture, so alternate shoes with each run. If you develop recurring and/or increasing aches and pains, contact a podiatrist to help pinpoint the problem and prevent more serious injury or long-term damage to your feet.

Enjoy your summer fitness program and avoid foot and ankle injuries. If you experience any discomfort in your feet or lower extremities, contact the Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois at 217-787-2700 to schedule an appointment. The Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois is located in seven convenient locations in Springfield, Decatur, Taylorville, Carlinville, Shelbyville, Sullivan, and Monticello, IL. Visit the patient library at myfootandanklecenter.com to review the literature on fitness and your feet. Also, view videos on new laser technology that is being used by professional sports teams to treat athletes and to help them return to sporting faster without pills and surgery.

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