

THE 60+ PLAYER'S COMPLETE GUIDE

Age-Smart Injury Prevention for the Senior Pickleball Player

The only guide built specifically for how your body plays after 60.

PHYSIOLOGY How recovery changes	WARM-UP 12-min age-adjusted	MAINTENANCE 3x /week protocol
SUPPLEMENTS 60+-specific stack	SLEEP Recovery for athletes	STRATEGY Joint-friendly play





THE HONEST CONVERSATION

What actually changes after 60 — and why it's not what you think.

YOU ARE NOT DECLINING. YOU ARE ADAPTING.

The 60+ pickleball player's body is not broken. It is different. Tendons are stiffer but not weaker if trained correctly. Muscles recover slower but respond to loading at any age. Balance declines — but proprioception training reverses it within weeks. This guide is not about managing decline. It is about training smarter than the 40-year-olds.

THE 4 PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES THAT AFFECT YOUR GAME

COLLAGEN DEGRADATION

Tendons become less elastic and take longer to adapt to new loading. The fix: consistent progressive loading (not rest), collagen + vitamin C supplementation, and longer warm-up time for tendons to become pliable.

01

REDUCED BONE DENSITY

Impact loading increases fracture risk — but resistance training and D3+K2 supplementation actively rebuild bone density at any age. Court shoes with good lateral support reduce ground-impact forces significantly.

02

SLOWER MUSCLE RECOVERY

Recovery shifts from 24 hours to 48–72 hours after 60. This means: never play hard on back-to-back days, prioritize sleep, use creatine (the most evidence-backed supplement for muscle preservation in older athletes), and take rest days seriously.

03

REDUCED PROPRIOCEPTION

Joint position sense — the internal awareness of where your body is in space — declines with age. This is the direct cause of ankle sprains and falls. Single-leg balance training reverses it within 4–6 weeks of consistent practice.

04

THE BOTTOM LINE:

"Every one of these changes is trainable. The players who adapt their approach keep playing into their 80s."



THE 60+ WARM-UP

Age-adjusted 12-minute protocol. More thorough by design.

12 MINUTES

EVERY GAME

NON-NEGOTIABLE AT 60+

WHY 60+ PLAYERS NEED MORE WARM-UP TIME, NOT LESS:

Tendons and fascia take longer to reach pliable temperature after 60. Rushing this stage is the primary cause of the first-game injury. Budget the time. The court will still be there.

1 SUPPORTED HIP CIRCLES

10 circles each direction · hold chair or wall

Hold a stable surface and draw large hip circles. Support removes balance demand so you can focus entirely on joint range-of-motion. This is the single most important warm-up movement for pickleball court mobility.

2 SHOULDER PENDULUMS

30 seconds each arm · let gravity do the work

Lean forward slightly, arm hanging free. Let it swing in small circles, then larger. Gravity-assisted decompression of the shoulder joint — the gentlest way to warm the rotator cuff before loading it.

3 ANKLE ALPHABET

A-Z each ankle · seated or standing

Trace the full alphabet with your foot. At 60+, ankle proprioception is a primary injury risk factor. This exercise is the most complete activation of ankle joint position sense available without equipment.

4 CAT-COW SPINAL SEQUENCE

10 slow reps · breathe into each position

Hands and knees (or standing version: hands on thighs). Arch and round the spine fully. Lubricates the lumbar facet joints stressed by pickleball's rotational load. Essential before the first serve.

5 ARM CROSS-BODY SWINGS

15 reps each arm · controlled arc

Swing each arm across the chest, then open wide to full external rotation. Activates the rotator cuff progressively. At 60+, starting with a smaller arc and building to full range prevents impingement.

6 SEATED TORSO ROTATIONS

10 reps each side · sit at edge of bench

Sit upright, rotate fully to each side with arms extended. Seated position removes lumbar compression. Primes the thoracic rotation required for every dink, groundstroke, and overhead.

→ Exercises 7-12 on next page



THE 60+ WARM-UP

Continued — Exercises 7 through 12

7 STANDING KNEE RAISES

10 each side · hold wall if needed

Drive each knee to hip height in a controlled march. Activates hip flexors and challenges balance. Use support without hesitation — the goal is hip activation, not balance testing at this stage.

8 MINI SQUAT

10 reps · chair behind you · heels stay down

Stand in front of a chair, squat until you barely touch the seat, stand back up. The chair provides safety and teaches proper depth. This activates quads, glutes, and VMO — the three muscle groups most protective of the knee joint.

9 HEEL-TO-TOE WALK

30 seconds · slow and deliberate

Walk placing each heel directly in front of the previous toe. Challenges the vestibular and proprioceptive systems simultaneously. One of the most effective ankle stability exercises available — and it requires no equipment.

10 WRIST CIRCLES + FOREARM SHAKE

30 seconds each arm · full range

Full circles in both directions, then 10 seconds of forearm shake. Cold tendons in the forearm and wrist are the direct mechanism of Pickleball Elbow — the #1 60+ injury. Never skip this.

11 SMALL LATERAL SHUFFLES

30 seconds · small steps · stay low

Short lateral shuffles, feet never crossing. Stay low, knees soft. This sport-specific movement activates the hip abductors and fast-twitch lateral stabilizers that protect the knee from the side-loading of court movement.

12 SHADOW DINKING — SLOW

45 seconds · deliberate · both sides

Slow, controlled dinking simulation. Feet moving, body rotating, wrist controlled. At 60+, this neural warm-up is as important as the physical warm-up — it re-establishes the motor patterns that make movement automatic and safe.

FULL 12-EXERCISE SEQUENCE AT A GLANCE

Hip Circ

Pendulum

Ankle AB

Cat-Cow

Arm Swin

Torso Ro

Knee Rai

Mini Squ

Heel-Toe

Wrist Ci

Shuffles

Shadow D



MAINTENANCE PROTOCOL

3× per week · 20 minutes each · The foundation of longevity.

DAY A LOWER BODY + STABILITY

DAY B UPPER BODY + SHOULDER

DAY C CORE + HIP + MOBILITY

DAY A GOAL: Build the lower-body resilience that absorbs court impact.

Every lateral step, split-step, and knee bend in pickleball loads the lower chain. This 20-minute session targets the exact muscles that protect your knees, ankles, and hips.

1 WALL SIT

3 sets · 30 seconds · thighs parallel

Slide down a wall until thighs are parallel to the floor. Hold. This isometric quad load is the safest way to build knee-protective strength — zero impact, zero joint shear. Progress to 45 sec, then 60 sec over weeks.

2 STEP-UPS

3 sets · 10 each leg · 4-inch step · slow descent

Step up, hold 1 second at top, lower the opposite foot slowly for 3 seconds. The eccentric descent is where the strength is built. Use a step, curb, or low box. Hold a rail for balance if needed — that doesn't reduce the leg benefit.

3 CLAMSHELLS

3 sets · 15 each side · band optional

Lie on side, hips stacked, knees bent 45°. Rotate the top knee up like a clamshell. Targets the glute medius — the most important muscle for lateral knee stability and the most undertrained muscle in recreational pickleball players.

4 STANDING CALF RAISES

3 sets · 15 reps · 3-second descent

Rise on toes, hold 1 second, lower slowly. The slow eccentric phase loads the Achilles tendon and soleus in the way that prevents both Achilles tendinopathy and ankle sprains. Do these near a wall for support if needed.

5 SINGLE-LEG BALANCE

3 sets · 30 seconds each side · progress to eyes closed

Stand on one leg, soft knee. When this becomes easy, close your eyes. When that's easy, add small head turns. This is the most direct intervention for the proprioceptive decline that drives ankle injuries in 60+ players. Four weeks of this changes outcomes.



MAINTENANCE PROTOCOL

Day B — Upper Body + Shoulder Stability

DAY B GOAL: Protect the rotator cuff and reverse forward-head posture.

Overhead shots and forward dinking posture are the two main shoulder stressors in pickleball. This session rebuilds the posterior shoulder strength that overhead play erodes over time.

1 BAND EXTERNAL ROTATION

3 sets · 15 reps each arm · elbow at 90°

Elbow tucked at side, bent 90°, band attached to a door or pole. Rotate forearm outward against resistance, return slowly. This targets the infraspinatus and teres minor — the two rotator cuff muscles most responsible for overhead injury prevention.

2 SCAPULAR RETRACTIONS

3 sets · 15 reps · squeeze and hold 2 sec

Squeeze shoulder blades together as if trying to hold a pencil between them. Hold 2 seconds. Directly counters the forward shoulder posture of dinking. This single exercise, done consistently, prevents more shoulder injuries than any other intervention.

3 WALL PUSH-UPS

3 sets · 12 reps · full range · slow

Hands on wall at shoulder height, step back, lower chest toward wall slowly. Safer than floor push-ups for 60+ players with shoulder or wrist concerns — same muscle activation, fraction of the joint load. Slow the descent to 3 seconds for maximum benefit.

4 BAND PULL-APARTS

3 sets · 15 reps · arms at shoulder height

Hold band with both hands, arms straight forward at shoulder height. Pull apart to full extension. Activates posterior shoulder, mid-traps, and rhomboids simultaneously. The most efficient posture-correction exercise available.

5 SLEEPER STRETCH

2 sets · 45 seconds each side

Lie on your side, shoulder and elbow at 90°. Use the top hand to gently press the bottom wrist toward the floor. This stretches the posterior shoulder capsule — the structure that tightens in overhead athletes and directly contributes to rotator cuff impingement.

Rest at least 1 day between Day A and Day B sessions. Recovery is where adaptation happens.



MAINTENANCE PROTOCOL

Day C — Core + Hip + Mobility

DAY C GOAL: Build the core stability that protects the lower back under rotation.

The pickleball swing generates rotational force through the lumbar spine on every shot. Core stability — not flexibility — is what prevents disc and facet joint injury.

1 DEAD BUGS

3 sets · 8 each side · slow and controlled

Lie on back, arms up, knees at 90°. Slowly lower opposite arm and leg toward the floor without letting the lower back arch. Return and repeat. Dead bugs are the gold standard for safe core activation — they train anti-extension without any spinal compression.

2 BIRD DOGS

3 sets · 10 each side · hold 3 sec at top

From hands and knees, extend opposite arm and leg, hold 3 seconds. Keep the spine completely neutral — no hip rotation, no arching. Trains the multifidus, the deep spinal stabilizer that declines most with age and is the primary lower back protector.

3 HIP 90/90 STRETCH

2 sets · 45 seconds each side

Sit with both legs at 90° angles (front and back). Lean gently forward over the front shin. This is the deepest hip external rotation stretch available — it directly addresses the hip stiffness that leads to compensatory lower back rotation in pickleball movement.

4 PALLOF PRESS (BAND)

3 sets · 10 each side · anchor at waist height

Band attached to a pole at waist height. Hold with both hands at chest, press straight out and hold 2 sec, return. The core works to resist rotation — exactly how it functions during every pickleball swing. This is anti-rotation training in its purest form.

5 CHILD'S POSE + SIDE REACH

2 sets · 45 sec each side

Kneel, sit back on heels, reach arms forward. Walk hands to one side until you feel the stretch through the side ribs and lat. Decompress the lumbar spine while lengthening the lateral chain. The most complete post-session spinal reset available.

MON
DAY A

TUE
PLAY

WED
DAY B

THU
REST

FRI
DAY C

SAT
PLAY

SUN
REST



THE 60+ SUPPLEMENT STACK

What the evidence actually supports for older athletes. No BS.

THE CORE 4 — EVERY 60+ PLAYER SHOULD BE TAKING THESE

These four supplements have the strongest evidence base for older athletes. Everything else on this page is additive. Start here.

COLLAGEN PEPTIDES

15g + 100mg Vitamin C · 30-60 min before play or exercise

The most direct intervention for tendon repair and joint cartilage maintenance. Vitamin C is required for collagen synthesis — take them together, 30-60 min before loading the tendons.

VITAMIN D3 + K2

2000-5000 IU D3 + 100-200 mcg K2 · daily with a fat-containing meal

D3 is essential for calcium absorption and bone density. K2 directs calcium into bone rather than arteries. The combination is the most evidence-backed bone health intervention available.

CREATINE MONOHYDRATE

3-5g daily · any time · most important supplement for 60+

Preserves muscle mass during aging (sarcopenia), improves power output, and has emerging evidence for cognitive benefits. This is the single most important supplement for older athletes — yet most 60+ players have never considered it.

OMEGA-3 FISH OIL

2-3g EPA+DHA daily · with food

Reduces systemic inflammation, supports joint lubrication, and improves recovery between sessions. Look for a combined EPA+DHA count on the label — not total fish oil content. 2g EPA+DHA minimum.

TARGETED ADD-ONS — BASED ON YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS

MAGNESIUM GLYCINATE

400mg before bed

Muscle recovery + deep sleep. The glycinate form is the most bioavailable and the least likely to cause GI issues.

Poor sleep is the most underrated recovery factor in older athletes.

TART CHERRY EXTRACT

480mg concentrate post-game

Reduces post-game muscle soreness and systemic inflammation. Strong evidence for athletes with 48-72 hour recovery cycles — precisely the 60+ profile.

GLUCOSAMINE + CHONDROITIN

1500mg/750mg daily

Moderate evidence for cartilage support in weight-bearing joints. Most beneficial for players with existing knee or hip osteoarthritis. Takes 6-8 weeks to show effect.

Budget stack (~\$55/mo): Creatine + D3+K2 + Omega-3 + Magnesium

Complete stack (~\$110/mo): All Core 4 + Tart Cherry + Glucosamine

Always consult your physician before starting any supplement protocol, particularly if taking medications.



SLEEP & RECOVERY

The most overlooked performance factor in athletes over 60.

YOUR BODY REBUILDS DURING SLEEP, NOT DURING EXERCISE.

Exercise is the stimulus. Sleep is the adaptation. After 60, growth hormone production during deep sleep — the primary driver of tissue repair — declines significantly. This means sleep quality matters more for older athletes, not less.

THE 60+ RECOVERY TIMELINE

0-2 HOURS	Rehydrate + consume protein. Window for collagen + vitamin C if not taken pre-session.
2-24 HOURS	Inflammation peaks. Light movement (walking, gentle stretching) outperforms rest. Avoid NSAIDs — they blunt adaptation.
24-48 HOURS	The repair phase. Sleep is the primary intervention. A full day off court here is not weakness — it is the protocol.
48-72 HOURS	Return to play. If soreness persists past 72 hours, it is a signal to reduce volume or intensity in the next cycle.

IMPROVING SLEEP QUALITY FOR OLDER ATHLETES

Magnesium glycinate: 400mg before bed. The single most evidence-backed sleep supplement. Reduces cortisol an...

Tart cherry juice: 8oz of tart cherry concentrate 1 hour before bed on play days. Natural melatonin precur...

Room temperature: 65-68°F (18-20°C) is optimal for deep sleep. Body temperature must drop 1-2 degrees to ...

Consistent wake time: More impactful than bedtime. A fixed wake time anchors circadian rhythm regardless of w...

Limit play after 7pm: Exercise raises core temperature and cortisol. Evening play delays sleep onset by 60-90...



COURT STRATEGIES

Technique and equipment adaptations that reduce joint stress.

SMART TECHNIQUE IS THE MOST POWERFUL INJURY PREVENTION TOOL YOU HAVE.

Equipment choices and technique adaptations can reduce joint loading by 20–40%. These are not compromises. They are the tools of a player who plans to be on the court at 80.

TECHNIQUE ADAPTATIONS

GRIP PRESSURE: Reduce grip pressure to 4/10 between shots. Re-tighten only at impact. Constant gripping cre...

DINKING POSTURE: Bend from the knees, not the waist. The "kitchen crouch" with a rounded back compresses lumb...

OVERHEAD REACH: Take overhead shots slightly in front and to the side of the body — not directly above the s...

SPLIT-STEP TIMING: A smaller, softer split-step reduces ankle and knee loading. You don't need height — you nee...

PADDLE WEIGHT: A lighter paddle (7.0–7.4oz) significantly reduces the cumulative load on the elbow and wris...

EQUIPMENT CHOICES THAT MATTER

COURT SHOES

Lateral support is more important than cushioning. Replace every 40–60 hours of play — the midsole compresses invisibly while the upper leaks firm...

PADDLE GRIP SIZE

An undersized grip forces overgripping to control the paddle. Measure: index finger should just fit between fingertips and palm when gripping.

COMPRESSION SLEEVES

Knee and elbow sleeves improve proprioception and warmth during play. Not a substitute for strength — a complement to it.

COURT SURFACE

Cushioned courts (Plexicushion, Sport Court) reduce lower extremity impact by 15–25% vs. hard concrete. Worth traveling to when possible.



REST VS. PLAY

The decision framework every 60+ player needs.

NORMAL SORENESS — PLAY THROUGH

Safe to continue playing

- ✓ Diffuse muscle ache (not joint)
- ✓ Worse in the morning, eases with movement
- ✓ Symmetrical (both legs, both arms)
- ✓ Improves noticeably after warm-up
- ✓ Fades within 48–72 hours

WARNING PAIN — STOP PLAYING

Do not play through this

- ☒ Sharp, localized joint pain
- ☒ Pain that worsens during play
- ☒ Swelling or warmth in a joint
- ☒ Numbness or tingling
- ☒ Pain that does not ease after warm-up

THE REST DAY DECISION FRAMEWORK

How does it feel during warm-up?

Eases significantly → likely DOMS, safe to play | No change or worsens → rest day

Where is the pain?

In the muscle belly → usually safe | At or in a joint → stop, assess, consider physio

What is your recent load?

Played 3+ days in a row → scheduled rest | First game in a week → warm-up more thoroughly

Rate it 1–10 at rest

1–3 → manageable, modify intensity | 4–6 → rest and monitor | 7+ → see a physio

WHAT TO TELL THEM:

"I play pickleball 3–4 times per week. I want to continue. What should I monitor and what should I avoid?"

WHAT TO ASK:

"Is my bone density sufficient for court sport? Should I get a DEXA scan?"

"Are any of my medications affecting muscle recovery or bone density?"

"Which specialist should I see if I develop joint pain — physio or ortho?"



QUICK REFERENCE CARD

The 60+ Player's Complete Guide · @ThePickleDoctorOfficial

12-MIN WARM-UP

1. Supported Hip Circles
2. Shoulder Pendulums
3. Ankle Alphabet
4. Cat-Cow Spinal Seq.
5. Arm Cross-Body Swings
6. Seated Torso Rotations
7. Standing Knee Raises
8. Mini Squat
9. Heel-to-Toe Walk
10. Wrist Circles
11. Small Lateral Shuffles
12. Shadow Dinking (slow)

CORE 4 SUPPLEMENTS

Collagen 15g + Vit C
D3 2000-5000 IU + K2
Creatine 3-5g daily
Omega-3 2-3g EPA+DHA
– ADD-ONS –
Magnesium 400mg (bed)
Tart Cherry post-game
Glucosamine + Chond.

MAINTENANCE WEEK

MON: Day A – Lower Body
Wall Sit · Step-Ups
Clamsells · Calf Raises
Single-Leg Balance
WED: Day B – Shoulder
Band External Rot.
Scapular Retractions
Band Pull-Aparts
FRI: Day C – Core + Hip
Dead Bugs · Bird Dogs
Hip 90/90 · Pallof Press

REST vs PLAY

PLAY THROUGH:

Diffuse muscle ache
Eases after warm-up
Fades in 48-72 hrs

STOP + ASSESS:

Sharp joint pain
Swelling or warmth
Numbness / tingling
Pain worsens in play
Doesn't ease at warm-up

THE COURT IS YOURS.

The players who play longest are the ones who train for longevity.

That is what this guide is. That is what you now have.

THE ELBOW PRESCRIPTION

The 6-week protocol for the
#1 pickleball injury.

THE WARM-UP BIBLE

Every warm-up for every
game situation.

THE PICKLE DOCTOR APP

Interactive protocols + tracking
on iOS and Android.



THE PICKLE DOCTOR

STAY ON THE COURT. STAY OUT OF PAIN.

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