

Fit over 50

We round up five low-impact, high-value sports that will help you stay fit, have fun and slow the ageing process. *Words: Anna Gardiner*

A recent study on mice found there's a correlation between exercise and the reduction in cognitive ageing. It found that there was a 'sweet spot' of 35 days of physical exercise that improved learning and memory. This is great news, but as we get older, our muscle strength declines, plus many people worry about the effect of high-impact sports — like running — on joints. Here we look at five sports that are great for exercise but low for physical stress.

STANDUP PADDLEBOARDING

Although it appears sedentary, standup paddleboarding (SUP) is anything but — being great for muscular strength and endurance. Jo Moseley, of successful podcast The Joy of SUP, says maintaining balance requires good core and leg strength, and pushing the paddle through the resistance of the water ensures you'll have a great full-body workout. To get started, find a local lake that offers watersports — instructors are often accredited by ASI, British Canoeing, BSUPA, ISA or WSA.

Beginner's kit: inflatable board (get advice on best boards from your instructor).

OPEN WATER SWIMMING (OWS)

Swimming is a low-impact, full-body, aerobic workout that uses most muscles, including abdominals, glutes and shoulder muscles. Swimming in cold water can also accelerate calorie loss and boost your immune system, plus it's been proven to help with depression. OWS experienced a rise in popularity in summer 2020, but swimming in supervised lakes as a beginner is a must. Find a venue at swimming.org/openwater/how-to-start

Beginner's kit: Swimsuit, goggles, and wetsuit.

GOLF

About 5.2 million in the British Isles people played golf in 2020, and 28% of them were women. On an average 18-hole course, you're likely to walk four plus miles, on undulating ground. This improves cardiovascular fitness and strength, which is needed to be able to swing



the club multiple times, pull the trolley and lift the bag. Contact your local club for beginner's lessons. **Beginner's kit:** Clubs and trolley, but speak to an expert before investing.

WALKING NETBALL

Having landed in the UK in 2017, this sport has steadily grown in popularity. It requires the skill and tactics of regular netball but at a reduced pace, lessening the likelihood of turning an ankle and reducing impact on joints. As Carla Smith, from Chippenham Lassies Walking Netball, says: "It improves flexibility, stamina and balance, increasing fitness levels. It's more than just an exercise class — we laugh, we chat and we create a supportive social group, which improves mental health." Check out englandnetball.co.uk

Beginner's kit: Supportive trainers.

CYCLING

Cycling offers many benefits, including fitness and a sense of freedom. During the pedal stroke, you use all the leg muscles plus your heart and lungs — strengthening you aerobically too. Big hills can be daunting but electric bikes take the sting out of climbs, enabling newer and/or more mature cyclists to enjoy scenic bike rides without worrying if they can go the distance. Message your local club to see if they'll lend you a bike on a try-out basis.

Beginner's kit: Bike, helmet and a brush up on the Highway Code.

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Wellbeing at COMO Castello Del Nero

Hidden among the rolling hills of Tuscany lies COMO Castello Del Nero, within easy driving distance of the Renaissance cities of Florence and Siena



At the heart of the historic 740-acre estate of COMO Castello Del Nero is a 12th-century castle layered with both Renaissance frescoes and contemporary design, with interiors by Paola Navone. For travellers looking to recharge and rejuvenate, the first Italian COMO Shambhala Retreat spa offers Asian-inspired holistic treatments for mind, body and soul, making this hotel the perfect Tuscan wellness escape.

The Experience COMO Shambhala programme is the best way to spend time revitalising in this beautiful destination. The programme has been carefully

designed for individuals to unwind and offers a range of therapeutic treatments, meditation sessions and fitness classes. Activities include group yoga and Pilates classes, signature COMO Shambhala and Deep Tissue treatments, and the use of the hotel's invigorating thermal suites, sauna, aromatic steam room and heated vitality pool.

For those looking to further elevate their yoga practice this summer, COMO Castello Del Nero is hosting a yoga and qigong retreat with James Rafael from 27 June to 2 July. The retreat has been crafted to give you the chance to

reconnect with yourself thanks to the healing power of Tuscany's bountiful nature. Morning practices will be gentle, leaving you feeling calm, alert and at ease in body and mind. Afternoon practices will be energising and dynamic, with more detailed guidance in the postures and movements, finishing with long, restful and grounding relaxation.

Each new day's classes will build on the previous day's practice. You'll experience a physical, mental and meditative sense of progression across the week as James introduces you to ancient philosophies, poetry and sacred texts — all designed to offer reflection, inspire and uplift.

THIS RETREAT INCLUDES:

- Five nights of accommodation in tranquil rooms and suites



- Twice-daily yoga and qigong practice with close guidance from James Rafael in alignment and flow
- Half board (breakfast with a choice of either lunch or dinner)
- Return airport transfers by car
- Starting at €7,125 (£5,966)
- Visit the websites listed below for more information



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