

Table Tennis is played with body

- Table tennis is played with the body, not the arm and hand. First, move your feet and body until you're close enough to the ball, then rotate your torso to make the bat contact the ball.
- In most cases, especially for developing players, it's much better to keep your arm and hand and elbow steady, pretty much in the same position and use your torso, legs and shoulders to move the bat and contact the ball. This gives you far better control than extending your arm and allowing the joints of the wrist, elbow and hand to flex and cause problems.
- The ball weighs next to nothing and it's almost always spinning. To deal with this, it is extremely important to be very, very relaxed in your body, arm and hand. You should grip the bat as if it's a delicate flower that you're afraid to crush. Even when you want to hit a high ball for a winner, you must remain relaxed like this. Even when you have to run 10 feet across the room to get to the ball you have to remain relaxed when you contact the ball. It's one of the important secrets of rapid improvement. Most people are much too tight and hit the ball much too hard. Try to feel the ball actually touch the rubber every single time you contact the ball. Practice bouncing the ball on the bat, and letting it roll on the surface. Get the feel for the rubber just grazing the ball ever so gently. Breathe in and exhale fully between points to relieve tension and relax your entire body.
- Mistakes are super common in table tennis. Players who improve rapidly forget about mistakes immediately and remain positive always having fun and trying to play well and looking forward with eager anticipation for the fun of the next ball.
- Good table tennis is not about winning or beating your opponent, or winning points. It's about executing your game to the best of your ability. Think effort rather than results and give yourself a mental pat on the back after every good try even if the ball goes sailing into the spectators and you lose the point spectacularly.
- A good ready position is all important. This should be a neutral position with your arm in a comfortable and high position in front of the body and with your feet proper (right foot slightly back for a right-hander), knees slightly bent, torso leaned forward slightly to create playing space in front of the body for your arm. Also, always try to be on the balls of your feet when in the ready, never on the heels
- Now, return to the ready position after every serve and every ball. Interestingly, a good ready position is very easy to practice because you essentially just stand in one place like a karate stance, so you can practice it quite easily, and anywhere. It's also one of the quickest ways for many beginners to improve because every stroke must begin and end in the ready position. If you don't have an established ready position, you will constantly be starting your shots in a different position, which makes the game far more difficult than it needs to be.
- To improve you need to practice the strokes and footwork. This takes some help, which you can get by asking at the club. The big mistake is getting into table tennis and always playing matches without training to improve. This is a recipe for playing the same. You may get to the point where you can beat some people who you didn't beat at first, however, you won't improve significantly unless you do drills and practice the fundamentals with no match pressure. Playing matches only reinforces mistakes until you develop the correct strokes and footwork and a sound game plan for you.
- If the stroke feels right, it is right. All the strokes in table tennis are based on things your body can do naturally and relatively easily. If you're trying to learn a stroke and it feels uncomfortable or you keep getting injured, you're doing something wrong. STOP! Get help. Ask someone to watch what you're doing. In almost every case, simplifying until it feels right will solve the problem but it's hard to figure it out yourself, so ask for help.
- Finally, when you watch the better players, you may say to yourself or friends 'It looks like they're not doing anything. It looks so simple.' Once I told a player in China, "People don't realize how hard it is to make it look so easy, the time it takes to learn to play simple, fluid, relaxed table tennis.
- But, the important point to keep in mind is something my Chinese coach told me, which was that the better you play the game, the less you do; all the unnecessary body and arm movements and even emotions or thoughts are eliminated! This makes a lot of sense and helps you focus as you practice and improve. The idea is that as a beginner player you do a lot of unnecessary things, which you can see if you watch the wild strokes and unusual footwork and body positions of entry-level players. If you learn the right strokes and footwork, however, and you work on them enough, you begin to do everything more simply with one ready position and one forehand and backhand counter, push, loop and so on, with all your strokes. Your game and shots and footwork becomes very refined and you essentially repeat basic things that you're trying to perfect over and over, and gradually you get very good at them so that they look very easy because you've repeated the same thing thousands and thousands of times. This is a powerful concept because those people who are always varying their strokes, footwork and body positions aren't repeating anything, aren't "grooving" their games, so they will improve very slowly if at all.
- If you want to play table tennis better you need to figure out (with the help of a coach or better player) what you need to work on, develop a good game and then practice basic things and your basic game strategies until you're very good at them. Notice I said "basic" things — good strokes and good table tennis is not complicated or advanced. It's within reach of anyone who does the right things and sticks with it. If it seems to you like table tennis is a complicated, difficult sport, that's a sure sign that you will benefit from some good coaching.
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