

Women's soccer -- get fit while having fun

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New Danish research shows that women benefit more from playing recreational soccer than from running when it comes to overall fitness. And that's not all -- women playing soccer experience a higher degree of motivation when it comes to sticking to their sport, and they increase their ability to bridge and create new acquaintances.

Over a period of two years, 30 scientist lead by Associate Professor Peter Krstrup, University of Copenhagen, have investigated physiological, sociological and psychological aspects of women's soccer in comparison to running. 100 untrained adult premenopausal women have participated in the study.

The women (65 participated in the physiological study) were randomly divided into three groups: One soccer group, one running group and one control group. The soccer players and runners trained twice a week for one hour. After four and sixteen weeks, all the subjects went through extensive physiological tests. The same 65 subjects + another 35 women playing in soccer clubs were continually observed and interviewed to study the sociological and psychological effects of their training.

Many women find it difficult to fit in sport and exercise in their busy daily lives, and many state family and especially small children as the main reason for not finding the time.

The study reveals that contrary to common assumption, the flexibility of running as exercise form actually makes running harder to stick to for most women than soccer, which requires a fixed time and place.

"What is really interesting is that the soccer players differed from the runners in their motivation. The runners were motivated by the idea of getting in shape and improving health. But the soccer players focused on the game itself and were motivated by the social interaction and by having fun with others. As it turns out, the soccer players got in better shape than the runners, and that combined with the social benefits makes soccer a great alternative to running", says Associate Professor Laila Ottesen and continues:

"The women who played soccer have continued their soccer training as a group whereas few of the women in the running group continued running after the study. Actually, some of the women from the running group joined teams with the soccer group after the project finished."

When choosing a sport, women tend to favour cardiovascular training to strength training although the build-up of muscles and bone strength are vital to preserve health into old age.

"While playing soccer, the women have high heart rates and perform many sprints, turns, kicks and tackles, making soccer an effective integration of both cardio and strength training", says project leader Peter Krstrup.

"Our study shows that the 16 weeks of recreational women's soccer causes marked improvement in maximal oxygen uptake, muscle mass and physical performance, including the endurance, intermittent exercise and sprinting ability, explains Peter Krstrup, and continues

"This makes soccer a very favourable choice of exercise training for women.

In the recent decade, we have seen a significant rise in women and girls playing soccer. It seems as though women are really beginning to take in

[soccer](#) and make it a popular sport for women on their own terms. This is a very positive step forward, not only because of the improved physical fitness and health profile but also for the enjoyment of sports", Krstrup concludes.

The present results will be submitted online in the high-level international journal "Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports" next week (Bangsbo, Nielsen, Mohr, Randers, Krstrup, Brito, Nybo and Krstrup. Performance enhancements and muscular adaptations of a 16-week recreational football intervention for untrained women. Scand J Med Sci Sports, 2009).

In January 2010, the same journal will publish a supplementum describing multiple [health](#) effects of recreational football for various subject groups, including men, women, young and elderly. The supplementum includes one review and 13 original scientific papers.

The data will also be presented at the Scandinavian Congress of Medicine and Science in Sports 2010, Copenhagen, Denmark, 4-6 February 2010, and at the 3rd International Football Medicine Conference in Sun City, South Africa, 19-21 February 2010.

The project group currently includes collaborators from Switzerland, Norway and Italy, and major applications are currently being processed to include collaborators from England, Portugal, Belgium, Australia and Kenya.

Source: University of Copenhagen

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