

Squash Guide for Selecting Equipment

Squash Physiotherapy in Huntsville

Welcome to ProActive Rehab's guide for selecting squash equipment. We recommend a few general considerations when selecting your equipment in order to stay comfortable and minimize injury while playing squash.

Eye Protection: Eye protection is probably the most important piece of equipment required for squash. Eye protection is mandatory in competition, and recreational squash enthusiasts should take the same precautions. There are several eye protectors to choose from in a variety of prices, but even reasonably priced goggles will provide the needed protection if they satisfy a few requirements: Goggles should be made from an impact-resistant material, such as a polycarbonate. Your eye protection should feel comfortable and fit snugly at the back of your head and on the bridge of your nose if they are designed to rest there. The protective shield over your eyes should wrap around your head to avoid balls entering from the side, and you should not feel like your peripheral vision is obstructed by your goggles. If you wear prescription glasses, prescription goggles can be made or you can wear regular goggles with your contact lenses. Wearing goggles over your prescription glasses can cause significant injury so this should be avoided. If possible, glasses with an anti-fog and anti-glare coating should be purchased, however, in order to keep your goggles from fogging up, it is also important that you warm them up prior to wearing them, and continue to wear them between matches.

Racket: The easiest way to find the correct racket for you is to try a few out! When purchasing a new racket, however, trying the racket in the squash court is not always possible, so following a few guidelines when buying will help to ensure you choose the right racket for your personal needs. The beginner player should choose a racket that is of moderate weight. Too light of a racket for a beginner will not allow them to control the ball. An experienced player, however, will find a light racket very useful for precision and control.

Another important feature to consider for a beginner is the size of the racket head. A larger racket head will be more forgiving as it has a larger sweet spot for optimal contact. The balance of the racket is also important. Rackets can be handle-weighted, head-weighted, or neutral. Again, trying the racket is the best way to determine what balance works for you. A few practice swings in the shop can assist in making the decision as to which racket 'feels right' even if you can't trial the racket on the court. Rackets that are head-weighted will allow more power whereas precision and quick motions are gained with handle-heavy rackets. A neutral racket offers a bit of both.

As with any racket sport, the tension in the strings will make a difference to how the ball can be played. Looser strings allow more power whereas tighter strings allow more control. Unless you are planning to have several rackets with different strings, or are going to re-string during a game, trying the racket out is again the easiest way to determine if the tension in the strings is right for you. Re-stringing a racket that has been used for a considerable amount of time can bring new life to a racket, and should be considered periodically.

Finally, the grip on the racket is extremely important as it allows each player to feel the shot they are making. Most players will cover the handle with tape (overgrip) which builds up the width of the grip to a comfortable level, and also enhances the ability to grip the handle itself. Without any overgrip, many beginner players find themselves gripping the racket too tightly in order to control it, which can lead to

strains and overuse injuries in the forearm and elbow. The amount of overgrip, however, can change the balance of the racket, so keep this in mind when applying the layers.

Ball: Choosing the right ball for your level of play will make a big difference as to how much you enjoy the game. Squash balls are standardized into 4 different balls and can be differentiated by the color of the dot on the ball. Yellow dot balls are for highly experienced players and have a dull bounce which forces players to be more agile. Double yellow dot has an even slower bounce, and is currently the competition standard ball. Green or white dot balls are for advanced players and exhibit a light bounce. Red dot balls are for intermediate players and have a responsive bounce. Blue dot balls are for beginners or young players, and have a lively bounce which allows a rally to be maintained even though skill level is not high. Balls should be replaced regularly. As soon as it is noted that the ball is not delivering the expected bounce, and has become dull, it should be replaced.

Court Shoes:

Any indoor athletic shoe is adequate for the beginner squash player. The use of runners versus court shoes can lead to more ankle sprains due to the higher heel height (made for shock absorption) in the runner, so it is not advised to use running shoes when playing squash. If you plan to keep playing squash or are playing at a higher level, good court shoes are a wise investment. The sole of a court shoe is made less for shock absorption (as in running) and more for gripping the floor and allowing for the repetitive and quick movements that the sport requires. When trying on the shoe be sure to wear the socks you will use to play in and put on any ankle braces you regularly wear to ensure they fit the shoe. Choose a shoe that fits extremely well: if they are too big you will quickly end up with blisters, and if they are too tight, you will experience pain and bruising in your toes and toenails. Replace your shoes regularly to maximize the support they give you; any visible smoothing of the sole or wearing through of the mesh means it is time for a new pair.

Socks:

Due to the repetitive motions required on the squash court, blisters are common, but you can avoid blisters by both choosing the correct shoes (see above) as well as the correct socks. Blisters are caused by repetitive friction, heat, and moisture, so minimizing these factors will decrease your chance of developing them. Choose a sock that is form fitting (not tube socks) and one that is made with a breathable and moisture-wicking material. Ensure the sock fits very well as any slipping will cause excess friction. Some squash players choose to wear two pairs of socks so any friction that does occur happens between the two layers of socks rather than against the skin. Lastly, ensure any hotspot (area that feels like a blister is starting) is tended to IMMEDIATELY. Avoiding blisters is much easier than treating them once they occur.

Clothing:

Special clothing is not required to partake in a squash match. Most players choose loose clothing that allows them to stretch and reach repetitively without restriction, however, form-fitting clothing can do the same, so other players choose tighter, but stretchier gear. All gear should be made of a lightweight material that allows you to stay cool and also wicks sweat away from the body so clothes don't get weighed down as your game progresses. Most players choose shorts to play in but some women prefer to play in skirts which is entirely acceptable as a skirt offers the ability to reach and stretch as needed throughout the game. Many players also choose to complement their gear with a sweat band for their forehead or wrists as the quick nature of the game, and the confined area of the court does not allow for regular towel breaks, and dripping sweat builds up quickly and can easily obstruct one's vision.

Hydration Gear:

Keeping hydrated during any activity will help you stay alert while training or competing, may help to prevent muscle cramps and will help your post-training or competition recovery. Squash is no exception. If you use your own drink bottles rather than drinking from the court water fountain you can easily monitor your fluid consumption. We recommend that you drink about 350-450 mL before arriving at a match, and 250mL (1 cup) of water or sports drink every 20 minutes during the match (ref: http://www.ausport.gov.au/sportscoachmag/nutrition2/pre-event_nutrition) and for one hour after the match. Your fluid requirements will vary depending on the environmental conditions and your body size. If you are participating in a round-robin squash competition you will need more water than if you are engaging in a single game after work, so hydrate accordingly.