

# Ten Quick Tips For Playing Better Table Tennis

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- 1) **Know what spin is on the ball.** The key to acquiring this important skill is to carefully watch the opponent's racket when it makes contact with the ball. If the opponent's racket is moving from low to high, the spin is topspin; from high to low, backspin; from his/her left to right, right sidespin; and from right to left, left sidespin.
- 2) **Compensate for the spin with your racket angle.** If topspin, angle your leading racket face downward and contact the ball above its center; if backspin, angle the leading racket face upward and contact the ball below its center; if right sidespin, angle the leading racket face to the right and contact the ball to the left of its mid-line; if left sidespin, angle the leading racket face to the left and contact the ball to the right of its mid-line. While holding the racket at the suggested angle, stroke gently forward. Only after you have developed a "feel" for the spin should you stroke the ball with more force.
- 3) **Use your whole body when you stroke your forehand.** Make sure that you rotate your hips and shoulders backwards during the backswing and then forward into the ball as you stroke your forehand drive. This motion should be coordinated with a transfer of your body weight from the back foot to the front foot. The harder you want to hit the drive, the more weight you must transfer. The most common mistake is to use only your arm to hit the ball, which severely limits your power.
- 4) **Maintain a good ready position.** A good ready position is balanced and prepares your body to move instantly in any direction. It is used when returning serves and in between strokes. The basic sequence of a rally is as follows: (A) put yourself in a good ready position, (B) move to the ball with your feet, staying balanced, (C) stroke the ball, (D) return to the ready position, and (E) repeat B and C.
- 5) **Train your strokes until they are "automatic."** When you first learn a new skill, you must use a lot of mental energy to formulate a clear mental picture of how the stroke looks and feels. Once this mental picture is relatively accurate, you must then practice that skill repeatedly until you no longer have to think about how you do it. This is your automatic stage. Your best performance will

come when you operate on "automatic" and you do not try to analyze your skill. You just "let it happen."

- 6) **Use only your own racket.** It's important to get your own racket and then use it exclusively. Every racket has its own "feel" and playing characteristics, and it will benefit you to use one racket so you're not always trying to adapt to a different racket. Also take good care of your racket; treat it with respect. Keep it in a case when you aren't using it. If you're using inverted sponge rubber (smooth surface), you should wash it with soap and water or a special racket cleaner after every use.
- 7) **Develop sidespin serves.** Few beginners use sidespin on their serves; whereas, top players will use sidespin on almost every serve. And, remember, sidespin is almost always combined with either topspin or backspin; pure sidespin is extremely rare in table tennis. Particularly useful is a sidespin/backspin serve that is low to the net and will bounce twice on the other side of the table. This type of serve will severely limit your opponent's serve return options.
- 8) **Keep your returns low over the net.** In general, the lower over the net you place your shots, the less angle your opponent can use and the harder it is for him/her to hit it hard. The one exception to this rule is if you use lobs, you will want to place the ball very high over the net (and as close to the end of the table as possible).
- 9) **Practice more than you compete.** By practicing, I mean all the time you spend developing your game by concentrating on some aspect you want to work on. The primary object during practice is to develop your game. On the other hand, when you compete, your main object should be to win, not to work on some part of your game. It is advisable to play practice games where the object is to blend in a new skill or tactic into a matchlike situation before you compete. The emphasis for these practice games is still on development, not winning. And when you compete, even though your main emphasis should be on winning, you can still learn a lot about your game (development) if you analyze your matches after they are over.
- 10) **Join a table tennis club.** To really make progress with your game, it's important to find others with similar desires and interact with these people. A table tennis club is the best place to do this. Most clubs have players of all different playing levels. Find someone of similar playing ability as yourself and make a commitment to each other to practice regularly. Periodically test your

progress by competing with players of higher ability. Also most clubs have a coach who can greatly speed up your development. To find a club in your area, contact USA Table Tennis, One Olympic Plaza, Colorado Springs, CO 80909-5769, (719) 866-4583, (FAX) (719) 632-6071, email: [usatt@usatt.org](mailto:usatt@usatt.org), or visit them on the web at [www.usatt.org](http://www.usatt.org).