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Ready, Set...

Football

Article By: Kyle Stack

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How touchdowns can help you trim down

Football is one of our national pastimes, and especially now that we're in the thick of Super Bowl mania, every man worth his weight in bean dip is going to be glued to the tube watching it. But this active sport can also be a great way for you to have fun and stay fit. Plus, in clubs and rec leagues, you can play it all-year-round.

Starting out

Obviously, the game's premise is for the offense to run or pass a football against the defense, with the goal of reaching the end zone, a designated area on either side of the playing field.

The offense, which uses a passer (quarterback), a runner (running back) and pass catchers (wide receivers), has four downs to move the ball at least 10 yards before turning it over to the other squad. A run starts behind the line of scrimmage, while a forward pass, which can be made only once per play, requires the quarterback to throw the ball to a receiver beyond the line of scrimmage.

There are typically 11 players on each side, although three or four per team will work. Ensure there's a person (defensive back) covering each receiver as well as one player (defensive lineman) designated to rush the quarterback or stop the running back.

There's no need to tackle players as the pros do. Two-hand touch, in which a defender "tackles" the ball carrier by placing two hands on him, or flag football, where a defender pulls one of three flags worn around an offensive player's waist, should suffice.

Six points are rewarded for a touchdown. Since most fields don't have goalposts through which to kick the point after touchdown, simply run a one-point pass play from three yards in front of the end zone after a touchdown is scored.

If you're interested in studying up on the official rules of the National Football League, you can check them out [here](#).

Gearing up

Dress for the weather and keep in mind how your choices will affect breathability and range of motion.

For sunny, warm days, choose microfiber-based performance shirts made from polyester and elastane, like those produced by Under Armour, Nike and Reebok. They'll wick away moisture to keep your body cool and dry. Opt for mesh basketball shorts or running shorts with athletic socks and a pair of cross trainers in which you can comfortably run and make quick cutting moves.

On colder, wet days, wear a long-sleeve performance shirt to trap body heat. Go for pants made of similar fabrics as the performance shirts, but make sure they don't restrict your movement when you run.

Cleats aren't necessary but take into consideration the playing surface. If it's wet grass, mud or snow, then football cleats are the safe route to ensure minimal risk of injury, such as twisted and sprained ankles or a strained groin.

Warming up

Contrary to popular belief, stretching doesn't have to be part of a normal warmup routine. "You can stretch all day and you're stretching a limited number of muscle fibers through a limited range of motion," says Dan Riley, who spent 27 years in the NFL as the strength and conditioning coach for the Washington Redskins and Houston Texans.

Instead, Riley emphasizes active warm-ups, such as easy jogging and [lunges](#), which run muscles through a greater range of motion.


"You'll feel better and be more flexible afterward," Riley says.

You also need food to gather the energy for all those touchdown dances. Mitzi

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Dulan, RD, CSSD, prefers healthy carbohydrate-laced energy bars such as Lärabar, Clif Nectar or Pure Bar.

"The main source of energy for your muscles is carbohydrates," says Dulan, who co-authored The All-Pro Diet with pro football player Tony Gonzalez. "They help delay fatigue and provide the energy not only to the working muscles but also to the brain."

Playing the Game

Once on the field, even novices can incorporate strategy into their play. "Run short [pass] routes," says Jamie Dukes, a 10-year NFL veteran who now serves as an analyst for NFL Network. "If you're the quarterback, get the ball into the hands of your receiver so that he can create space from the defender."

If a player is running with the ball along the edge of the playing field, Dukes urges the defender to take an angle that gives him "at least three or four steps with that player." That way, the defender gets more than one shot at putting two hands on the ball carrier or pulling his flag.

All that running will primarily work your lower body, specifically the hamstrings, gluteus maximus (a.k.a. buttocks) and the hip flexors (the muscles on the front of the thigh near the hip).

If you experience soreness, Riley advises working through two total-body strength workouts that incorporate exercises for the major muscle groups, such as [lat pulls](#), [squats](#) and [hamstring curls](#).

Taking It to the Next Level

If you're looking to participate in a more competitive environment, Riley advises running pass patterns during the week that you might try in the next game. "By doing that, you're at least taking your muscles through the range of motion that you'll go through when you actually play the game," Riley says.

No matter your skill level, it's still imperative to have fun. After all, football is a great workout option versus the predictability of the gym. "It makes maintaining your weight and staying healthy fun," says Dukes.

Next Steps

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