

## Bridge, more than just a card game

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### Why take up Bridge?

Anyone who plays bridge will tell you that bridge is a fascinating, competitive, engaging and exciting card game that is an ever-changing puzzle (honest, Prof. Samantha Punch from the University of Stirling asked them). Some who don't play bridge might tell you that 'Bridge is an old person's game'. This isn't entirely true. The perception that bridge is for older people has most likely come about because years ago, before iPads and various other forms of shiny technology, people would find entertainment in card games, where they would socialise with each other and have fun with family and friends. Parents and grandparents would teach their children and grandchildren, and it was quite common for universities to have bridge clubs. In fact, bridge used to be very popular and trendy, it often featured in older movies with great actors and actresses of their time (e.g. Bette Davis, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Sophia Loren) (Millennials – Google them). As more and more technology became available, fewer younger people were taking it up but the older people were still enjoying a game that they started playing when they were young. However, there are also many young people all over the world who do enjoy bridge and what it has to offer.

An appealing feature of bridge is that it is played in pairs or in teams. It is something that can be taken up individually, helping form new friendships. It can also be learnt with a spouse, partner or friend or anyone else looking for a new joint leisure activity or maybe just because sometimes meeting new people for the first time on your own can be a little daunting. Either way, it is a great opportunity to get out of the house and build on current relationships or to form friendships and connections with potential bridge partners and to meet new people in your community and beyond, be it at local, national or even international arenas. With so many social media platforms that enable people to engage with one another online, such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat, bridge offers the chance to enjoy face-to-face social interaction with people within bridge clubs and across the world. Having bridge to talk about also means that there is a focus to conversations, which can sometimes be quite awkward when first meeting people, particularly for those of us who struggle with social communication. In fact, many bridge players begin their friendships playing bridge but continue to enjoy them outside of the bridge community.

As well as the game itself being an interesting and exciting leisure activity, that triggers adrenalin for players, providing mental stimulation and challenges it also offers the chance to compete at a high level and to be rewarded for these efforts; personally, with a sense of achievement and more formally at tournaments. It can be enjoyed socially in a relaxed environment or more competitively at regional and national competitions. Players of any age and any level can get great pleasure from playing bridge. Competing and being focused on bridge can also help take time out and serve as a distraction to other areas of life such as exams, relationships, caring responsibilities and grief. Therefore, bridge has the potential to positively impact on people's social daily lives, alleviating boredom and reducing the risk of social isolation in a fun and exciting way. It also has the potential to offer opportunities to visit new places and meet people from all walks of life. For young people it can enhance school, college, university and social experiences. For older adults, being close to retirement age may potentially reduce social networks, however it also frees up more time to enjoy life at a more leisurely pace and to take up opportunities that perhaps were once restricted by work and/or family commitments. It could be considered then that bridge has the potential to positively impact on the lives of players of all ages. What's not to love?

More detail can be found in the following report funded by English Bridge Education & Development:

Galbraith, C., Punch, S. and Small, C. (2018) *Competition and Mental Exercise in a Mind Sport: Building Bridges of Fun and Friendship*, Aylesbury: English Bridge Education & Development (EBED),

<http://www.ebedcio.org.uk/health-wellbeing-research>