

Do Bridge Players Know the Secret to Longevity?

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Bridge is played with one ordinary deck of cards, but it's a uniquely beneficial game. Bridge can provide a good cognitive workout in addition to engagement, which combine to make an



activity that's ideally suited for seniors.

Learn more about the benefits of bridge, and if bridge players know the secret to longevity.

The Benefits of Bridge

In a recent article about “brain games,” we wrote that old fashioned mental exercises could be just as beneficial as brain training programs like Lumosity.

In response, we received a persuasive email from 93-year-old bridge enthusiast, author and blogger, Maggy Simony, who was surprised and disappointed that we did not mention bridge. Her letter began: “I’m a nonagenarian who not only plays bridge but blogs about it at [Bridgetable.net](#).”

Simony pointed out that bridge is every bit as strategic and intellectually demanding as a game like chess, but also an inherently social game. This distinction is important because it's well known that [staying socially connected](#) is key to healthy aging. Her letter opined that while chess is played silently against a solitary opponent, bridge involves a multiple players and requires communication skills. Bridge players say it's the synergistic combination of the strategic and social aspects of the game that make it so alluring.

As another nonagenarian bridge player, Georgia Scott, 99, told the [New York Times](#):

“It’s what keeps us going. It’s where our closest friends are.”

In the same Times article, neurologist Dr. Claudia Kawas referred to long-lived bridge players like Scott and Simony as “the most successful agers on earth.” She went on to note, “We think, for example, that it’s very important to use your brain, to keep challenging your mind, but all mental activities may not be equal. We’re seeing some evidence that a social component may be crucial.”

Bridge and the Secret to Longevity

Simony is a model of successful aging. At 93, she remains an influential figure in the worldwide bridge community and was even profiled in an in-depth Wall Street Journal article titled, “[A One-Woman Campaign for the Ladies’ Bridge Lunch](#).” She is also participating in a study of people aged 90+ that aims to find factors linked to longevity.



Bridge enthusiast and author Maggy Simony

She is convinced that bridge is among the reason she has lived so well for so long: “Nonagenarians like me know that taking up bridge is one of the best life decisions they ever made... I won’t be satisfied until learning to play bridge is included in every article on how to age well.”

Simony, who is an aficionado of social bridge rather than competitive bridge, described how playing bridge helped her develop a new social circle after moving to a new place: “I moved to Florida to live near my daughter in in 2003 when I was 83. Do you realize how hard it is to make new friends at that age? But with bridge, it’s different. I joined the Newcomers Club and I went to the Senior Center. Within a year or two I had a circle of totally new friends (in many cases much younger than me) who I play bridge with.”

Of course, Simony is hardly the only example of bridge players enjoying remarkable longevity. The average American Contract Bridge League member is 67 years-old, so there are a lot of older bridge players out there. In July, Hazel Brunford, one of the top bridge

players in Peterborough, Ontario [turned 100](#). Hazel is lore at her local bridge club, and when she makes a good play that has you looking foolish at the bridge table you've been "Hazelized" according to their club jargon.

I also spoke with 68 year-old Paul Bartron of [Tacoma, Washington](#) who is both the Washington State Senior Chess Champion and an avid bridge player. I met Bartron at the Tacoma Chess Club and asked him about about which game he prefers and was surprised by his answer. Speaking in a distinct English accent, he said, "I actually like bridge better, but only when I have a good partner" he said. "It's hard to set up a game and get four of my mates in one place, but when we do it's a load of fun." Bartron said that he plays bridge in a friend's home, usually over drinks, and agreed that it is a much more social game than chess.

The World of Bridge



Bridge Tournament Hall

Simony is an advocate for what she calls sociable bridge, which is an informal variety of the game. Social bridge can be quite different than competitive bridge, which is played in tournament halls instead of living rooms. Competitive bridge players usually play a variety of bridge called [duplicate bridge](#). Duplicate bridge is for those who enjoy the thrill of victory and the feeling of mastery more than socializing over cards and hors d'oeuvres. In duplicate bridge, the rules are modified to minimize the element of chance. For example, every player in a tournament will play the same hands to ensure that it's the skilled rather than the lucky who are victorious.

There are approximately 160,000 players registered within the [American Contract Bridge League](#) who play in sanctioned tournaments. Competitive bridge players focus on improving their skill over time. We got in touch with 71-year-old duplicate bridge player, Victor Bremson. He said he's a "youngster" at the tournaments he attends. He said that when you're a competitive bridge player "you're always trying to improve your game." The atmosphere at these tournaments can become charged enough that bridge partners will often turn on each other when things go wrong. "You find fault with your partner because they're not doing it your way," Bremson said.

Having a goal such as achieving mastery in bridge is a great way to keep engaged. And the concept of improving your bridge game over time could be considered a microcosm of improving yourself over time. Just as you always try to better your bridge skills, you can also always try to better yourself, no matter how old you are. It's this attitude of always

stubbornly fighting to improve is the hallmark of the survivor and could favorably influence the longevity and vitality of bridge players.

Finding Local Bridge Clubs

If you're interested in learning to play bridge, you can download free [software from the American Contract Bridge League](#) that demonstrates the rules. If you prefer to read the rules you can read a copy [here](#).

You can also find local bridge clubs through the [bridge club search form](#) on the American Contract Bridge League website.

Have you or a senior loved one found bridge to be an engaging activity? Share your thoughts with us on the game in the comments below.

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