



## **Playing Bridge Brings Mental Health Benefits, NZ Bridge Highlights During Mental Health Awareness Week**

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NZ Bridge, the national governing body for bridge, is highlighting the positive impact that playing bridge can have on mental well-being, during Mental Health Awareness Week. Not only is bridge great for brain health, it's also proven to have a positive impact on mental well-being.

Research conducted by Professor Samantha Punch at Stirling University, Scotland, reveals that *playing bridge can boost mental agility and provide several related benefits that support good mental health*. These include increased *focus, better problem-solving skills, and reduced stress levels*. Additionally, playing bridge *encourages social connection, promoting community engagement and reducing feelings of loneliness and depression*.

"Bridge is a game that requires focus, concentration, and problem-solving skills. All these are elements that can promote mental agility," said Samantha Punch. "But beyond that, bridge is a game that encourages social connections, which is important for mental health. In a digital age where face-to-face social interaction is less common, engaging with others in the game of bridge can be hugely beneficial."

Furthermore, A study in 2000 at the University of California, Berkeley, found strong evidence that an area in the brain used in playing bridge stimulates the immune system. Researchers suggest that is because players must use memory, visualization and sequencing.

NZ Bridge acknowledges the significant role that bridge can play in improving mental health, and thus encourages more people to take up the game. "Bridge provides a great opportunity to make new friends and take on new challenges. Like participating in any sport, be it a physical or mental sport, playing bridge is good for you mentally and physiologically," said NZ Bridge's Anne Barrowclough. "As we mark Mental Health Awareness Week, we would like to encourage more people to consider playing bridge - whether online or in person - to reap its many benefits."

Anne, a passionate bridge player, and founder of mental selfcare app, Wander120, says, "*Bridge is a great way to increase problem solving skills, with players loving the*

*mental challenge. Each game offers a unique challenge of problems and solutions. Every single deal is different; every deal poses a new problem and the challenge of finding the solution is a great source of enjoyment - even more so if you find the answer!"*

NZ Bridge supports a thriving bridge community around the country, with regular tournaments and events for players of all skill levels. The organization encourages people to join their local bridge club and enjoy the exciting and dynamic world of bridge.

### **About NZ Bridge:**

Bridge is a card game for four players, played as a partnership two against two using points of the compass to designate their position at the table. They use one pack of cards at a time and the pack contains fifty-two cards (no jokers). Having shuffled the pack the cards are dealt clockwise, one at a time until each player has 13 cards, after which the bidding phase begins.

NZ Bridge Inc is the governing organisation that oversees Bridge in New Zealand and is one of 104 countries affiliated to the World Bridge Federation.

New Zealand Bridge has around 14,000 registered Bridge players who belong to 110 affiliated clubs from Kerikeri in Northland down to Invercargill in the South. The game is truly international with millions of registered Bridge players all over the globe.

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### **Benefits of playing Bridge:**

- **Bridge exercises both sides of your brain:** Bridge is one of the few games that stimulates both the left and right sides of your brain. Every time you play, you use and improve your skills in communication, logic, math, memory, visualization and psychology. It's a unique type of mental workout that is both relaxing and invigorating, and that can't be duplicated by other leisure or work-related activities.
- **Bridge is social:** A game of bridge involves communication and cooperation with your partner and interaction with your opponents. There's a special camaraderie among bridge players that develops from the social setting and the game's emphasis on teamwork, ethics and sportsmanship.
- **Builds mental capacity:** Bridge requires concentration. You have to think about what you're doing, who bid what, and who played which card. It requires great mental stamina. At the highest international level you need to be able to play for

eight hours a day for up to a fortnight. The equivalent of two marathons a day for two weeks!

**For interview opportunities, or high-res images, please contact, Hayley Burrows; [Hayley@socialwithhayley.com](mailto:Hayley@socialwithhayley.com), 0273304807.**

For more information on Professor Samantha Punch's research, visit:  
<https://www.stir.ac.uk/people/292204>