

Bridge

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My new year resolution, as always, is to lose weight. And I've finally found the perfect diet: play more bridge. Bridge is a sedentary game, and it's true that some of us might look fitter if we took up kickboxing instead. But have you ever wondered why you feel so physically exhausted — not to mention ravenous — after playing in a tournament? The answer is that you've burned bucket-loads of calories.

I was told this by a couple of professional players (both admittedly — indeed, inexplicably — overweight) and I decided to check out the wonderful news for myself on a neuropsychology website. And it's true: bridge, like chess, is a big weight-buster. The point is that a 'highly challenging logical thinking task' is not the same as 'routine mental activity'. The brain needs more oxygen — and oxygen consumption in the brain burns calories in the form of glucose. Even doing a crossword puzzle burns up 1.5 calories per minute. As one neurologist explains, 'Although the brain represents only 2 per cent of the body weight, it receives 15 per cent per cent of the cardiac output, 20 per cent of total body consumption and 25 per cent of total body glucose utilisation.' In other words: bridge makes you thin.

So if you've had too much Christmas pudding, don't worry about hauling yourself off to the gym. Instead, try this mental workout, just one of many contained in the marvellous Hocus-Pocus series by Erwin Brecher and Julian Pottage:

	♠ A K Q J 10 7	
	♥ 2	
	♦ A 3 2	
	♣ A Q 2	
♠ —		♠ 8
♥ 4 3		♥ K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5
♦ Q J 10 9 8 7		♦ 6
♣ K J 10 9 8		♣ 7 6
	♠ 9 6 5 4 3 2	
	♥ A	
	♦ K 5 4	
	♣ 5 4 3	

South plays in 6 spades. West leads the ♦Q. How can the contract be made?

Answer: win the opening lead in dummy, come to hand with a heart, finesse the ♣Q and cash the ♣A. Now give up a trick to East's ♠8! With only hearts left, East must present a ruff-and-discard. Ruff in hand and throw a diamond from dummy. Five more rounds of trumps squeezes West in the minors.