

Pictures: VICTORIA JONES/PA



Delicious...cup of tea

## Microbes in soil are behind the taste of tea

By Nilima Marshall

THE reason a cuppa is so delicious could be down to the microbes on tea plant roots.

Researchers identified a group of bacteria in the soil that could make good quality tea taste even better.

Microbes work to boost the production of amino acid theanine, the main component behind tea's flavour.

A team in China said these influenced how ammonia – key in photosynthesis – was absorbed by the plants, which boosted theanine production.

Prof Tongda Xu, of Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, said by isolating and creating a synthetic microbial community, "we managed to notably enhance amino acid content in various tea plant varieties, resulting in an improvement in tea quality".

Researchers said the findings could also reduce the need for chemical fertilisers.

The study was published in the Current Biology journal.

## Exercise to beat blues

By Tara Fair

EXERCISE should be a "core treatment" for people with depression, a study suggests.

Walking, jogging, yoga and strength training are most effective – with vigorous exercise best, experts said.

The research team, led by academics in Australia, drew their findings from 218 clinical trials involving more than 14,000 people globally.

Their report, published in The BMJ, said: "Exercise could be considered alongside psychotherapy and antidepressants as a core treatment for depression."

# N-ice way for Torvill & Dean to bow out

By Chris Riches

**SKATING** champs Torvill and Dean prepare for a flying finish at the stadium where they won Olympic gold 40 years ago.

The Dancing on Ice judges returned to Sarajevo's Zetra Olympic Hall to announce they will be hanging up their skates for good next year.

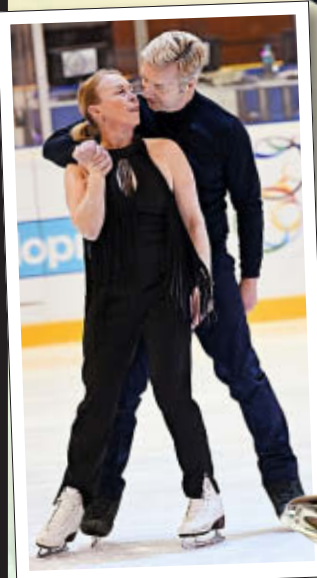
They also recreated their Bolero routine, which was rewarded with perfect scores in the 1984 Games, inset left.

Reflecting on their retirement, Christopher Dean, 65, said: "I think there comes a time when you know.

"We're not spring chickens any more but we're still able to do it to a certain degree that we feel good about it but that will go.

"So I think this is the right time for us to be able to do some of the old routines, be very nostalgic with friends of ours from the skating world and from Dancing On Ice. We're looking at it as a celebration."

He and Jayne Torvill, 66, will embark on one last tour around the UK from April 12 to May 11, 2025 – 50 years since they formed their skating partnership in 1975.



**Bolero 2023-style ...the skating duo recreate the magic in Sarajevo**



# Ping pong therapy

## Playing table tennis can help treat MS, doctor claims

TABLE tennis could soon be prescribed as a treatment for multiple sclerosis, according to a doctor who is pioneering "ping pong clinics".

Dr Antonio Barbera was diagnosed with MS in 2016 and believes the sport has helped him to walk again and regain lost motion.

A trial of his NeuroPong programme will begin in the US and Italy this week, and he hopes to eventually bring it to the UK.

Dr Barbera, 61, said he and dozens of others have seen "amazing" improvements in mobility, balance, flexibility and core muscle strength since trying the sport. He said: "I believe it has the

By **Hanna Geissler**  
Health Editor in Denver, Colorado

potential to revolutionise MS therapy around the world and I hope this trial will set that process in motion by scientifically validating the benefits that me and many others have seen.

### Challenge

"Being such a fast game, ping pong really challenges our brain much more than any other activity.

"It brings together aerobic activity and balance and eye coordination. It works the core and legs and it makes people

smile. Not only do their eyes, hands and feet need to be in sync, but they must process information in less than half a second for the paddle to react to the ball."

Dr Barbera, a professor at the University of Colorado, has spread his therapy programme from its first location in nearby Fort Collins to several other US states.

The 16-week NeuroPong trial, launching in Denver and Pavia, Italy, is thought to be the first to look at the benefits of table tennis for MS.

Caitlin Astbury, of the MS Society, said there is "a real possibility that table tennis could help people with MS".



**Sporting trial...Dr Barbera**