

Off The Couch!

Video Games That Encourage Activity

By: Kim Keough

“Turn off that video game!”

Have you been harassed to turn off your video games and get off the couch? Ever find yourself in a fight with your parents about it? That may be in part because video games have often been blamed for childhood obesity and laziness and your parent may have that in mind. But now, thanks to new technology, many companies are making video games that encourage lots of jumping, dancing, and sports simulations.

Now you can play really cool games that test your skills and let you brag about your high scores. But the kicker is that it might keep parents off your back. Now you can say these interactive games get the heart rate up and chest pounding – and that you’re meeting your daily recommendation for exercise!

Need more ammo to prove a point? Using video games for fitness has a couple of benefits:

Improved motivation: By playing against an opponent, or by trying to beat a previous score, video gamers may be motivated to try harder and do better each day.

Working different body parts: Video games geared toward strength training, balance and aerobics can be helpful in getting people moving, rather than just sitting stationary and working their thumbs on the game controller.

Bringing families together: You can play fitness-focused games with your parents, sisters, and brothers, improving the fitness of the entire family.



Shape Up!

You can burn more than four times as many calories per minute playing an active video game than playing a seated game.

Video Moves

The National Athletic Trainer’s Association says that proper technique is important with video games, as well as avoiding repetition of one type of movement to prevent “video-game shoulder or elbow” or other possible injuries. Try to alternate the use of gaming consoles with other physical activities, especially outdoor fun.

Popular Videos

If you're not sure what video game to buy, the Nintendo Wii is the most popular video game system for kids right now, recently reporting sales of over 10 million consoles. The Wii has been made popular by fitness games like *Wii Fit* and *Wii Sports*. *Wii Fit* features fun exercises such as yoga, balancing games, strength training, and aerobics, many of them using the Wii Balance Board, which acts as a controller that you use by moving your feet and balancing. Similarly, *Wii Sports* simulates playing various sports such as bowling, boxing, golfing, tennis, and baseball.

Competitors of the Wii are catching on to the high demand for this revolutionary gaming system. *The Swinger* is a game that is exactly like the Wii but is about one-third of the cost. *Yourself Fitness* is another popular video game available for PlayStation, Xbox, and PC consoles. The game features a personal trainer, Maya, who customizes workout plans and one-on-one training sessions based on your personal fitness goals. *Eye Toy Kinetic* is a full-body fitness program that uses a camera to feature you as the main character. The video recordings allow movement and activity to be tracked and displayed on your TV screen via your PlayStation. The game features two options for personal trainers who offer specialized programs in cardio, combat, mind and body, and toning.

If you prefer a celebrity trainer for your video game workout, check out fitness games by Jackie Chan. The Jackie Chan Fitness Studio has a game called *Power Boxing*, which uses wireless boxing gloves so you can train in the ring for a workout with Jackie Chan. The boxing matches can be played in championship, exhibition, or exercise modes.

Last but not least, one of the most popular video games, a noted pioneer in fitness-based gaming, is *Dance Dance Revolution*. This game, which came on the scene in 1998, was an instant hit. Since its creation, it has expanded internationally and is available on the Wii, PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo, GameCube, and PSP consoles. *Dance Dance Revolution (DDR)* uses a sensor pad or platform to track dance steps based on song beats and rhythm. DDR has become so popular that some schools now offer DDR as physical education class fitness option.

Fitness-based video games are now becoming the subject of research conducted to study improvement of kids' health (including studies done on eyesight improvement, weight loss, and fighting childhood obesity). Keep an eye out for future results on these.

This article has been reviewed by BodiMojo expert Karin Pfeiffer.