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Your Health: Can games like 'Wii Fit' really work it?

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Your Health
Kim Painter

By **Kim Painter, USA TODAY**

Are Wii fit yet? As a nation, we definitely are not in good shape. But 10 months after the launch of Nintendo's *Wii Fit*—the first hit video game marketed as an exercise tool—there are signs that, with the help of gaming systems, some of us might be making progress.

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Enlarge Nintendo

In *Wii Fit*, users standing on a movement-sensitive board follow an on-screen trainer through aerobics, yoga, strength exercises and balance games.

In January and February, *Wii Fit* was the best-selling video game in the USA and had sold more than 6 million units, says market researcher NPD Group.

Think about it: A game that teaches yoga poses and calisthenics is outselling games that teach warfare and auto theft. Marketers have noticed. More "exergames" are in stores or on the way: The latest, *Gold's Gym Cardio Workout* (from Ubisoft, for Wii consoles), goes on sale Tuesday.

'EXERGAMES': They can get kids off the couch

Fitness experts have noticed, too. Though no one says exergames will solve the nation's obesity problem, many hope they will produce real benefits.

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"Some exercise is better than none," and "none" is what many people get, says Cedric Bryant, chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise.

People who use exergames certainly move. In *Wii Fit*, users are invited to try yoga, strength exercises, aerobic activities and balance games while stepping and gyrating on a movement-sensitive board and following an on-screen trainer. The game tells users they are toning their bodies, improving posture and balance and burning calories.

But how much good does it do?

The exercise council is conducting a study to find out. So are researchers at the University of Mississippi. They are lending the game to eight families for three months and recording the results, says Scott Owens, an associate professor of health and exercise science.

"I think that for people who have been inactive, there's a good chance they can see improvements," Owens says. And the game may inspire some to join real yoga classes or jog outside, Bryant adds.

Even hard-core athletes may find some use for such games, says Sue Stanley-Green, a professor of athletic training at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. She is trying *Wii Fit* as a rehabilitation tool for athletes who are recovering from surgery or injury.

More fitness games on the way

Of course, any exercise program can cause injury. Exergames are no exception, experts say. They also worry that people will substitute light game workouts (such as the three-minute hula-hoop sessions on *Wii Fit*) for more rigorous activities (such as brisk 30-minute, real-world walks). And they say an ideal exergame would offer more useful feedback than *Wii Fit*, and some early imitators do.

But games that are more demanding, more interactive or both are on the way or already available, says Stephen Yang, assistant professor of physical education at the State University of New York-Cortland. For addictive, calorie-burning fun, Yang recommends *Eye Toy Kinetic* (for PlayStation2), a workout game that points a camera at the user to track movements and provide instant feedback.

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TOP VIDEO GAMES

Top-selling video games in February, in units sold (publisher and platform in parentheses):

- *Wii Fit* (Nintendo, Wii): 644,000
- *Street Fighter IV* (Capcom, 360): 446,000
- *Street Fighter IV* (Capcom, PS3): 403,000
- *Wii Play* w/remote (Nintendo, Wii): 386,000
- *Killzone 2* (SCEA, PS3): 323,000

Source: NPD Group

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E-mail kpainter@usatoday.com. Please include your name, city and daytime phone number. Selected questions will be answered in the paper and online.

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He also likes tween favorite *Dance Dance Revolution* (for various game systems), which is not marketed as an exercise game but fits the bill. And he directs parents to *Gamercize*, a British import that connects to any video game system — and keeps it running only as long as the user keeps moving on a mini-bike or step machine.

The future will bring games that track heart rates and keep exercisers working at a challenging but safe pace, he says. Virtual group workouts, with participants connected online to a live coach, will happen, too, he says.

But the games that work best, Yang says, will be the ones that are the most fun.

Next week: A review of current Wii fitness games.

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Spike_916 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 34m ago

The Wii does get you up off your @\$@ but its nothing like the gym. Difference is how much Calories you burn. Vigorous \$ex burns 50 calories in 45 mins, so you burn what? About 50 calories every hour or more play the game. One thing I was suprised me about how many calories you burn....fishing. Standing in fast current waters about thigh high, burns about 400 calories in 2 hours. Thats pretty good for just standing in running water. My advice....get off the cough and do something more then the Wii.

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IGMproducts (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1h 48m ago

Does NOT replace a work out at the gym.

Wii Fit can really work it, but you need to be careful using this system. I hurt my right knee really bad doing the Yoga session. I couldn't walk properly for almost 2 months, and the pain was horrible. I had to see an Orth Surgeon and get x-rays. I haven't used the system since that experience.

I would not rely on the Wii Fit for much than playing a participative video game. And, BE CAREFUL. Don't push yourself beyond your ability, and start slow.

I'll probably sell mine soon.

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alowe (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2h 6m ago

Exercising outside is definitely more enjoyable, but for those of us who are severe allergy sufferers it is not an option during the spring and fall. It is nice to have something different to do besides watching TV while using an elliptical or treadmill.

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Eurosnob (42 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2h 11m ago

I hope people can understand the difference between an ad or press release (for nintendo) and a real piece of journalism. And maybe people can also understand the difference between an indoor video game and real sports.

I have met two kind of people who regard the wii as a sport:

1. very lazy
2. very obese

I think it is a video game, nothing else. Go out and walk, breathe, live!!

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MarkFrance (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3h 33m ago

Hopefully, someone active enough to do a Wii exercise game regularly and correctly is too active to