

## **Fit to play: Video games give you a workout**

**Consoles are no longer just for couch potatoes. You can get a real workout with some of their newer games and accessories.**

BY JULIO OJEDA-ZAPATA  
Pioneer Press

Jeremy White recently had sore muscles after baseball — except he never stepped outside. He was playing virtual ball, courtesy of Nintendo's Wii console and its motion-sensing Wiimote, which let him simulate pitching and batting.

"I worked up a sweat," says the St. Paul man, who bought the Wii as a Christmas present for his two young sons. "You play with more passion than you realize."

Video gaming is no longer just for couch potatoes, as White and others have discovered. With the right titles and accessories, it can resemble a workout — and even replace traditional exercise in certain cases, as health researchers in Minnesota and elsewhere are concluding.

The recently released Wii has made physical gaming a worldwide sensation. 'Wii Boxing' can drive users into a frenzy, for instance, as they punch, jab and lunge Muhammad Ali-like with the stick-shaped Wiimotes. 'Wii Baseball' and 'Wii Tennis' inspire similar exertion.

This has made a Wii believer of Gini Dietrich. Normally, the Chicago woman is "morally against video games." But when she saw her nephew boxing on a Wii, she had to try it for herself.

"I am in excellent shape, (but) my arms and abs were sore the next day," Dietrich says. "Now I'm wondering if it's not a good idea to have (a Wii in my) house so I can get different workouts than my normal spinning or cycling."

Wii games aren't the only titles to get users off the couch and into motion.

Konami's "Dance Dance Revolution," used with grid-like, pressure-sensitive floor pads, have had music fans obsessively precision-stepping for years. Sony's EyeToy, a motion-sensing digital camera used with its PlayStation 2, has spawned physically demanding games like "EyeToy: Kinetic," which puts users in the game — literally. Participants appear on-screen, via the EyeToy, and can frenetically interact with descending spheres and other elements as a stern trainer exhorts them to increasingly difficult fitness feats.

Angella Wong of San Francisco got "EyeToy: Kinetic" on a whim and was surprised at how obsessed she became with it as an alternative to going to her health club. She says she's usually exhausted after a console workout.

The game is "good at getting your cardio going if done right," Wong says, "and it offers a lot of alternative workouts, such as tai chi and yoga. There's also a section where players follow instructions to do sit-ups, lunges, leg lifts, etc."

Best of all, "the trainer will yell at you if you miss a session," she adds. "It's great."

Health researchers at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester recently documented the degree to which some video games can help combat rampant childhood obesity — which they say is largely caused by too-sedentary video gaming.

They invited 8- to 12-year old children — some overweight, some not — to try body-moving games. These included "Dance Dance Revolution: Ultramix 2" for Microsoft's Xbox as well as "Nicktoons Movin' " for use with Sony's EyeToy. For comparison, the researchers also had the children engage in other commonplace activities.

The physical games proved comparable to walking on a treadmill and burned two to six times as many calories as watching TV or playing a sit-down video game, according to the study.

"The point is that children — very focused on screen games — can be made healthier if activity is a required part of the game," says study co-author Lorraine Lanningham-Foster.

West Virginia University researchers also used "Ultramix 2" in a child-obesity study. Their recent findings were so promising that "Dance Dance Revolution" is now being used in public-school physical education classes throughout West Virginia. Even "DDR" clubs and competitions are in the works.

The Wii is so new that researchers have yet to draw firm conclusions about it. One pediatric chiropractor believes it shows promise, however, at least as a complement to traditional sports.

The chiropractor, Elise Hewitt of Portland, Ore., has even recommended the Wii for certain patients so obsessed with regular video games that they have head, neck and back problems from all their time hunched over controllers.

But frantic Wii use can cause its own physical problems, says Hewitt, who got a Wii for her children. Her advice: Stretch thoroughly before playing, and take breaks every 20 to 45 minutes.

A handful of Wii users are conducting their own informal gaming-as-exercise studies. Dana Kaufman of suburban Boston set up a WorkoutWithWii.com site to publish Wii-exercise information, as well as to document his own Wii regimen.

"I'm trying to see how much weight I can lose in 30 days" with 30-minute daily sessions of "Wii Tennis" and other fitness games, Kaufman says. He was more than a week into his program at press time and pleased with his modest weight loss.

Another Wii user, Mickey DeLorenzo of Pennsylvania, is due to complete a six-week Wii-exercise program today and intends to publish his results — with charts, before-and-after photos, time-lapse video boiling his six weeks down to a few minutes, and more — at [www.wiinintendo.net](http://www.wiinintendo.net).

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