

Video Games May Offer Health Benefits, Experts Suggest

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Carpinteria, CA ([PRWEB](#)) February 13, 2007 -- A recent investigation into the health effects of playing video games, conducted by the International Sports Sciences Association (ISSA), a teaching institution and certification agency for fitness trainers, resulted in some unexpected findings.

Video games have often been blamed as a contributing factor to the nation's epidemic of obesity, high blood pressure, Type II diabetes and other lifestyle diseases largely caused by inactivity and a lack of physical exercise. However, with the implementation of new technologies, video games may prove to be just what fitness experts are looking for to help their clients get more active, increase their heart rate and spend less time sitting on the couch.

"Exertainment and home video consoles are the wave of the future," asserts Dr. Josh Trout, Professor of Kinesiology at California State University Chico, who specializes in video game technology and exercise movement. "Exergaming can provide excellent health benefits, but so can a Stairmaster, lifecycle or treadmill, if you do it. If a person has chosen a sedentary lifestyle, there is not much a new technology is going to do for them. On that note, exergaming, and exertainment, is an excellent way for getting kids hooked on physical activity, producing good exercise habits that can last their lifetime."

Since 1988, the International Sports Sciences Association (ISSA) has provided personal trainers, aerobic instructors and medical professionals in every field of healthcare with an education in the fitness sciences. The ISSA has been providing certification and continuing education to personal trainers who own and operate fitness facilities, managers and fitness directors of health clubs and general populations that want to increase their knowledge base.

In examining the potential benefits of movement based video games on the nation's fitness, the ISSA reached into this pool of educated and knowledgeable fitness professionals and posted several questions on their interactive members' discussion board. Personal trainers were asked about possible health benefits and risks related to the use of 'exertainment' technologies implemented in such consoles as the Microsoft Xbox, the Sony Playstation 3, and the Nintendo Wii.

"I think that any gaming system that gets the users off the couch and moving around has obvious health benefits. I saw kids using the Wii in the mall, and they were working up quite a sweat playing the boxing and tennis games," reports Al Grant, an ISSA Certified Fitness Trainer and father of two. One of the big names in video gaming of late has been the interactive Wii, manufactured by Nintendo. This product, which competes with the Sony Playstation and Microsoft Xbox, sets itself apart by offering an interactive remote, known as the wand, which acts as the tennis racquet, baseball bat, or whatever tool is needed to play the game. But because of a massive recall due to a faulty controller, the Nintendo Wii is forced to enhance the design of their patented controller. "The benefits can go beyond the actual games themselves in my opinion," adds Grant. "Video games sometimes serve as a springboard to the real sports, and believe it or not, it was actually recommended by my son's football coach that he play Madden 2007 to learn the plays that they want to implement in the coming season."

Maureen Jeanson, ISSA Certified trainer and mother of five, also agrees that there are rudimentary health benefits to be gained through exertainment in that, "Simply moving can increase one's metabolism." She goes on to assert, "The Nintendo Wii can get teens off their butts, but it would need to be a more full-body involvement game to benefit in way of fitness. As far as striving for better fitness, I think the Dance Dance Revolution games have been used successfully by a lot of beginners in various fat burning programs as a way to do enjoyable cardio."

Who will benefit most as a result of exertainment? Dr. Thomas Fahey, Dept. of Kinesiology, Exercise Physiology Laboratory at California State University Chico and author of ISSA Youth Fitness Trainer curriculum stated, "I think youth is the obvious target because they are the greatest consumers of video games. However, deconditioned and obese people could benefit because they are usually embarrassed to exercise in health clubs. The problem will be that most aren't used to using video games."

Nearly all of the trainers who responded to the inquiry agreed that teens and preteens were likely to receive the most health benefits as a result of the advent of exertainment. However, of the exergaming available today, Dance Dance Revolution, which can be played on Xbox and Playstation consoles, seems to have a high "fun quotient" that gives it a broader appeal to the population at large. "While I think most of these will benefit teens and pre-teens, Dance Dance Revolution seems to be more friendly for use by people of all ages and fitness levels," says ISSA Certified Trainer James O'Neill, "It has really slow beginner levels all the way up to serious workout levels and everything in between. How do I know this? My 17-year-old daughter has one and her 62-year-old grandmother uses it with her and feels great after 20 minutes of doing it."

What about concerns voiced by several trainers that the Nintendo Wii's physical intensity is lower than necessary to achieve greater fitness? "Most benefits of physical activity occur when progressing from sedentary to moderately active," asserts Dr. Fahey. "So, even though 'exertainment' may not produce high levels of fitness, it promotes physical activity and can help people meet the physical activity recommendations of the Surgeon General, USDA 2005 report, and the new 2007 ACSM exercise guidelines that will be released in February."

Most people may be thinking 'how in the world can a video game help someone get in shape,' but Dr. Fahey is surprisingly positive. "Exertainment will promote metabolic health. Moderate intensity exercise reduces insulin resistance, promotes sodium-potassium pump activity, burns some calories, and promotes nitric oxide production. It also has positive effects on immunity and builds resistance to free radicals."

Nichole Snow, an ISSA Certified Personal Trainer and avid gamer, sums up the development of exertainment nicely, strongly advocating its potential for realizing health benefits for every segment of the population, whatever the game, whatever the console. She advocates Dance Dance Revolution along with her fellow trainers as "...definitely more of an aerobic game - I see kids all the time enjoying it and losing weight - I think they gain a lot of aerobic exercise without realizing it." And don't try to tell her that the Wii just doesn't allow you to get active enough to achieve real fitness. "The Nintendo Wii will show benefits for everyone," she suggests. "Whether you can sit down for the game or you have to be standing, it involves movement. The best part is its just fun - for everyone. Deconditioned and obese individuals will find it fun to play and gain aerobic movement out of the games. Seniors can enjoy gentle movements of bowling and golfing. Youth become a part of the game and don't just turn into vegetables in front of the TV. Everyone can burn some calories and learn some good health habits from Nintendo Wii's fitness, and the system is just too hard to pass up when watching anyone play."



It is important to note that medical side effects of playing video games have been reported, including photosensitive epilepsy, hand and eye strains, auditory hallucinations, wrist pain, neck pain and repetitive strain injuries. All the case studies showing negative consequences of playing were of children and adolescents who used video games excessively. While sufficient research is still needed, ISSA's findings suggest that people who play video games excessively are at the most risk for developing health problems. As with anything in life, the key to reaping health benefits from exergaming lies in moderation.

Regardless of your intentions for playing, whether it is to relax after a hard day's work, a long night studying, or just to sit on the couch, you just might find yourself breaking a sweat and burning some calories when you think all you're doing is having a good time.

About ISSA

Since 1988 the International Sports Sciences Association (ISSA) has provided certification and continuing education to over 80,000 fitness professionals. ISSA certifications are recognized worldwide. From Sports Conditioning to Youth Fitness, ISSA offers 10 certification programs and dozens of continuing education courses. For more information on the ISSA, please visit: www.issaonline.com

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