

5 Straight Facts about Video Games and Fitness

Active video games, such as Wii Fit™, Gold's Gym Cardio Workout, and others, have become very popular gifts in the past few years. They are found in family living rooms and even in school gyms. The important question is: Can these games actually improve fitness in our increasingly sedentary society? The answer: **It depends!**

1. Active video games can provide moderate activity.

Based on independent research (not on company claims), games can expend more energy than just sitting on a couch watching TV or playing a regular video game. The energy expended is, however, highly variable from person to person. Overall, the calories burned by active video games are generally in the same range as moderate walking.

2. Active video games can help very sedentary folks.

One of the best uses for active video games may be helping very sedentary children and adults (including older adults) become more confident in their ability to do physical things. The games allow people to experiment in the privacy of their own homes - and to discover that they are able to enjoy moving their bodies in different ways.

3. Active video game measurements may be flawed for kids.

Several experts in kinesiology (the science of human movement) have questioned the accuracy of the measurements, such as BMI (Body Mass Index) and calories burned, reported in active video games. In particular, the BMI calculators on some games may not be using data that is accurate for children, whose BMI is calculated differently than adults.

4. Active video games must be used consistently.

Few long-term studies have measured active video games in 'real life' situations. A study at the University of Mississippi that actually measured the impact of Wii Fit™ use in several families indicated some possible pitfalls. While some fitness indicators did improve in the beginning of the study, the minutes of use - and fitness levels - declined over several weeks.

5. Active video games are not a substitute for outdoor play.

"Go outside and play" had been the mantra of parents for generations, until the advent of what some are calling the 'Playstation Generation.' The work of researchers around the world is confirming the wisdom of the advice to be active outside. Several recent studies have noted the physical, mental, and psychological benefits of outdoor activities.