EXCERCISE FOR LIFE

On Your Feet

Lillian Faybik, 87, of Manhattan, New York, plays baseball on the Wii at The Carter Burden Center for the Aging in New York. Nintendo visited the center to demonstrate video games that appeal to adults.

Forget the image of young teens sitting on the couch. A new generation of video games that require the player to physically move while playing has become popular with people of all ages.

The genre of exercise video games, or “exergames,” is quickly expanding—from Konami’s Dance Dance Revolution™, a popular dance and rhythm game, to the Nintendo® Wii™ (pronounced “wee”), which uses motion-sensor technology to score players as they mimic the moves of popular sports, including tennis, boxing, bowling and golf, among others. Holding a Wii remote, the player “swings” a club or racquet or “throws” a punch or a bowling ball.

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Both Dance Dance Revolution and Wii Sports have been studied for their heart rate-raising value. In fact,Wii was the first video game to be included in the President’s Challenge, a program of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports that encourages Americans to be more active. Exergames are available at many senior and community centers, where they have become a popular group activity.

In early 2008, Nintendo introduced WiiFit™, which uses a balance board and a “virtual trainer” to guide users through more than 40 activities, including yoga, strength training, aerobics and balance exercises. The game also uses the board to measure the user’s body mass index, a weight evaluation based on a ratio of weight to height, allowing users to track their progress over time. WiiFit can be a good tool to jumpstart an exercise program, and to supplement a more comprehensive fitness regime.

Experts stress that it is important for individuals of all ages to add more movement to their daily routines—to be moderately active throughout the entire day, not just when they are at the gym or on the golf course. While exergames should not replace regular exercise, adding video games to leisure time is a fun way to increase one’s daily physical activity.

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