Dear Alice,

I know there are video games out there now that require you to move more, unlike traditional video games. Are these games, like Wii Fit, a good way to be more active or are they doing more harm than good?

Thanks,

Gaming for Exercise

Answer

Dear Gaming for Exercise,

Using exercise video games, or exergaming, has become popular with many seeking to increase their physical activity in a fun and interactive way. While exergaming might not be as good as the ?real thing,? it certainly isn?t bad for you. The bonus is that there is no credible evidence indicating that exergames are harmful or unsafe. So, if you find it difficult to motivate yourself to do traditional forms of physical activity, video games that involve exercise are an excellent alternative to being a couch potato.

Some exergames are better than others at encouraging aerobic activity and increasing motivation. There are many types and brands of exergames including those that are console based as well as those which use portable hand held devices. Some smart phones even allow you to download exergames giving them an added level of convenience. Exergame platforms offer a wide range of activities from team sports to yoga, and even dance.

Research has shown that, if you exergame at moderate or high intensity, you can indeed improve your fitness. The most effective exergames were found to be the ones that combine strenuous physical activity with entertaining gameplay as opposed to playing a video game simply for the fun aspect of it without emphasizing the physical activity component.
It’s fairly straightforward: For some, exergaming can be more fun than working out. So, if you don’t like to work out and find an active game that you like, this a better alternative to passively sitting on the couch playing traditional video games or watching TV! However, if you partake in exergaming, make sure to take breaks of at least five to ten minutes every hour or so to walk around and stretch. If able, stretch your lower back by standing up and pulling each knee to your chest, holding that position for a few seconds.

While exergames aren’t exactly a substitute for other forms of exercise, they’re worth considering if you want to find ways to be more active. If you are planning on a rigorous physical activity regiment, it is always recommended that you speak with a healthcare provider. In addition to determining your health and fitness, s/he can provide you with more detailed information about developing a safer and more effective exercise program for your specific needs.

Game on!

Alice!
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