

# Exergaming? What is that?

By Laura M. Boyer, RN, CBN

**There is an emerging trend in the home video gaming industry that allows for more physical interaction. A combination of exercise and video game technology is called "exergaming."**

While home gamers have always had button-controlled sport themed games available, the addition of more physical participation is an exciting and attractive feature. The more recent breed of game controls sense movement and position of the player.

The level and mode of interaction varies. For example, mats and balance boards can simulate skateboards, skis and dance floors for a high level of exertion while handheld controls provide for more sedate interaction. Some games utilize a combination of both.

## **The goal of all of this – get the gamer moving!**

These types of activities may be especially attractive to individuals with mobility limitations. Many of the games can be played by swinging and moving just the handheld controls. Activities for assisted living and nursing homes now include such sports as virtual bowling, golf and tennis. People who once enjoyed these sports find they are now able to enjoy the game once again, just at a different level.

The games can also be played with the full range of movements used to swing a racket or golf club, or roll a bowling ball. Recreational directors are using the Nintendo Wii tennis game for rainy day indoor play as an opportunity to teach rules and strategy and to work on form. In addition to the physical involvement, "exergaming" has a strong social component which encourages group interaction and friendships.

There is a growing variety of simulated sports and exciting activities available, such as snow and skate boarding, track and field competition, obstacle courses and dance contests. The idea of children spending time running, jumping and dancing sure beats the "couch potato" version of gaming. Clearly, the benefit here is that both adults and children are having fun, without realizing that they are exercising.

## **More than just exercise**

Of course, as with exercise videos, the gamer only gets the benefit of a workout when truly participating. This became obvious to me when I was playing a simulated boxing match with my teenager. I was pulled into the excitement, punching and ducking with all my strength. I looked over at her and she



was calmly moving the handheld controls and getting the same results with just a flick of the wrist. My arms were tired and my heart rate was up, and she hadn't even broken a sweat!

So, if you want your family to move more than just their hands, the games with the interactive mat for running and dancing are a better choice.

## **The fitness aspect**

There are a variety of programs designed specifically for fitness, some with specialized equipment. There are a few limitations such as the need for a television in a spot with the space to move around. The Wii Fit balance board has a weight limit of 330 pounds. The fitness programs offer some customization and feedback regarding weight, body mass index and fitness levels, but they are basic and not meant to replace professional guidance.

Avid and experienced gym patrons may be disappointed with this method of exercise, however those who would otherwise never pursue exercise instruction will likely see some benefit from the opportunity to learn at home and workout in a private setting. After a little confidence building, a trip to the gym might not be as intimidating.

Will "exergaming" be as big as the home exercise video movement? No one has a crystal ball, but we do know that any type of exercise is worth pursuing, whether it's a walk in the park or a virtual iron man competition. Just do something! As with any workout regimen, commitment and consistency are the keys to success.

## **About the Author:**

*Laura M. Boyer, RN, CBN, has been Director of the Bariatric Surgery Program for the Surgical Specialists of Louisiana, serving the southern Louisiana area, since its inception in 2001. She has been a registered nurse for 25 years with experience in peri-operative and critical care.*



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