



The Healthy Kids Series

Video Games with a Healthy Twist



| BY AMANDA AYERS |

Many avid players have reported weight loss, improved blood pressure and overall fitness while using DDR and Nintendo Wii.

Since the first game of Pong was played on Atari, video games have increasingly become a central part of our culture.

With video games now being played on home television sets, computers, handheld game systems, arcade machines, and cell phones, a new era of play has parents challenging the new technology.

While traditional video games are often criticized for contributing to the childhood obesity epidemic, the 21st century has ushered in a new wave in video game revolution that integrates health-themes and physical activity with digital media. Today, video games aim to improve health in many different ways and they are showing tangible results.

On the forefront, Nintendo Wii and Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) have become new fads in aerobic exercise. Nintendo Wii is a video game console featuring a wireless controller that enables the user to interact with the game through physical gestures and body movement. Dance Dance Revolution, also known as DDR, is a video game played on a dance pad with four arrow panels: left, right, up, and down. These panels are pressed using the player's feet, in response to arrows that appear on the screen in front of the player. The arrows are synchronized to the general rhythm of a chosen song. The goal is to time and position the player's steps to create dance like movements.

Many avid players have reported weight loss, improved blood pressure and overall fitness while using DDR and Nintendo Wii. In an effort to battle childhood obesity, many schools implemented DDR as a physical education activity in gym. A recent New

York Times article reported that at least several hundred schools in ten states are now using DDR as a regular part of their physical education curriculum. West Virginia's Department of Education will install DDR in all of its public schools this year.

These video games are also making their way into community and recreation centers, gyms, and events. James Yount, Weight Room Director of Burke Racquet and Swim Club implemented new active digital media games into a core exercise program aimed at children. The "Exergym" includes a Nintendo Wii, DDR, a rock wall, and interactive bikes. The interactive bikes feature computer screens and wireless technology that allow users to race each other on courses through tropical islands, the streets of Paris, and other incredible locations. Yount claims the Exergym has had a positive effect in the following ways:

- Developing body coordination. The digital exercise programs make users integrate a visual concept and body movements.
- Increasing speed and agility. The aerobic game systems increase reaction time by forcing the user to make quick physical movements to accomplish the goals of the game.
- Improving the cardiovascular system. Nintendo Wii and DDR are an exciting new way to get your heart and blood pumping, and burn calories.
- Increasing social and family interaction. As 90% of Exergym goers are children, Yount has seen an increase of parents playing with their children in the Exergym.

Many organizations have begun to develop video games with measurable health

impacts in mind. HopeLab, a California non-profit organization, aims to help young cancer patients through video games called Re-Mission. These games features a petite robot named Roxxi, who travels through the body demolishing cancer cells and bacteria with a sidearm loaded with chemotherapy drugs and antibiotics. A recent Washington Post article reported that by playing Re-Mission, adolescents learned that failing to eliminate every cancer cell may lead to a recurrence. During the game, teens found that a recurrence was bad for their score and their health. Children also understood cancer better and were more confident of their ability to fight cancer after playing Re-Mission.

At the 2007 Marine Corps Marathon Healthy Kids Fun Run, the Minute Clinic used a Nintendo Wii to get kids excited about Health and Fitness. The interactive exhibit had kids waiting in line to experience the new technology.

Video games that aim to improve children's health are still in early development, but many have already begun to improve the well-being of many children and their families. The new health-themed games are changing the behavior of children in a healthful way while challenging them physically and mentally.

Articles in the Healthy Kids Series are presented by the Marine Corps Marathon Healthy Kids Fun Run to be held on October 25, 2008. The one-mile run welcomes children ages 6-13.

Registration is open at www.marinemarathon.com. Amanda Ayers is the Marketing Coordinator for the Marine Corps Marathon. No federal or Marine Corps endorsement implied.

