Wii Fit or False?

Does the popular fitness game actually make you healthier?

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Most people don't warm up before playing video games the same way they do before hitting the gym. But that may change. The Nintendo Wii system and its motion-control technology have inspired millions of gamers to get off the couch and get active while they play in front of their televisions.

One game for the system, *Wii Fit*, includes more than 40 activities and exercises, including strength training, aerobics, yoga and balance games. It even allows you to chart your progress and check your body mass index (BMI), which measures the relationship between height and weight. But does playing *Wii Fit* really improve your health?

Not necessarily, says Scott Owens, an associate professor of health and exercise science at the University of Mississippi.

In a six-month study, Owens and his team loaned eight families a Nintendo Wii and *Wii Fit* to use for three months. Then they compared family members' physical activity levels with their amount of exercise during a three-month period without the game in their home.

Researchers found that while children who played the game showed significantly improved aerobic health, in general, the families did not enjoy similar overall benefits in terms of daily physical activity, muscular fitness, flexibility, balance or body composition.

One of the most surprising results of the study, Owens tells Real Health, was that daily *Wii Fit* use per household declined by more than 80 percent, from 22 minutes during the first six weeks to just four minutes during the second six weeks.

"If you use [*Wii Fit*] consistently, my guess is you'd see some benefits," Owens says. "But people tend to use equipment more right after purchase and then stop. Of course, then you definitely won't see any benefits."

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/Wii-Fit-RHSUMMER2010-18457-4609