

Active video games a good alternative for kids

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A participant in the study of active video games plays Nintendo Wii Boxing. Researchers studied energy consumption, heart rate and exertion during the games. Credit: OU Medicine

Scientists at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center have found that playing active video games can be as effective for children as moderate exercise. The findings appear this week in the journal *Pediatrics* from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

While OU pediatricians don't recommend children stop playing outside or exercising, the research shows that active video games offer a great alternative to moderate exercise for many children of today's generation who are sedentary and at high risk for obesity and diabetes.

"These exer-games are no substitute for 'real' sports activities, but if kids

play them as designed and stay engaged, they can burn several calories per hour above their sedentary level. We view any increase in energy expenditure (calories burned) as a good thing, especially in our overly-sedentary society," said Kevin Short, Ph.D., principal investigator on the project.

To test the idea, researchers measured the heart rate, energy expenditure and self-reported exertion in children between ages 10-13 while they watched television, played active video games and walked on the treadmill at three different speeds.

Compared to watching television, the calories burned while gaming or walking increased 2- to 3-fold. Similarly, high rates of energy expenditure, heart rate and perceived exertion were elicited from playing [Wii](#) boxing, Dance Dance Revolution Level 2 or walking at 3.5 mph.

Wii bowling and beginner level DDR elicited a 2-fold increase in energy expenditure compared to television watching.

Overall, the energy expenditure during active video game play was comparable to moderate-intensity walking. Thus, for [children](#) who spend considerable time playing electronic screen games for entertainment, OU researchers found that substituting that time with physically active games can be a safe, fun and valuable means of promoting [energy expenditure](#).

More information: The study can be found online in *Pediatrics* at pediatrics.aappublications.org ... act/peds.2008-2851v1.

Source: University of Oklahoma

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