

## GET-UP! Video game will fight obesity

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(Medical Xpress)—Reversing the image of the sedentary game player, a new video game under development by University of California, Davis, researchers will encourage children to strengthen their action-hero characters by logging miles walked and calories burned in the real world.

Researchers in the UC Davis School of Education and Foods for Health Institute are teaming with a professional game designer to create the game, which requires players to enter personal health data and set physical goals. The project is funded with a two-year, \$500,000 grant from the National Science Foundation aimed at fighting [childhood obesity](#).

"Gamers project their identities into game play in various ways already, but we are particularly interested in what might happen if the avatar in a game is tied directly to the gamer's body and his or her actions outside the game," said Cynthia Carter Ching, a grant recipient and School of Education professor who also is an expert in learning with technology.

Ching and her colleagues, J. Bruce German and Sara Schaefer, both from the UC Davis Foods for Health Institute, and Marta Van Loan, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Western Human Nutrition Research Center, are teaming up with Play4Change, a nonprofit led by Ariel Hauter that develops serious games for social causes.

The game is scheduled to be in use by health educators in select South Sacramento schools next spring for 11- to 14-year-old students.

The project, "GET-UP: Gaming to Educate Teens about Understanding Personal Health," will have youth participating in the initial development, testing and launch of the game. They will wear activity-monitor devices that measure such things as steps walked, floors climbed and calories burned. These data, along with diet logs and [health](#) and nutrition information they receive prior to play, inform the choices youth make and their rate of progress in their journey through the game.

For example, a student who records more physical activity on a given day may find that their avatar is faster and stronger the next time they log in to the [game](#). As a result, the student can see short-term positive rewards for their healthy actions—such as not eating a dessert or walking after school—long before they lose weight or change sizes, Ching said.

"Recreational games are often blamed for kids' obesity, and some gaming platforms like Wii Fit and X-box Kinect have tried to make gaming itself more active, but our approach is different," said Ching. "It's exciting to see if, instead, we can leverage games to positively affect behavior that impacts physical fitness even when the gamer is not playing."

GET-UP will be offered to students participating in programs supported through the California Afterschool Network, housed in the UC Davis School of Education.

**More information:** [playgetup.com/about.html](http://playgetup.com/about.html)

Provided by UC Davis

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