

## Cyber buddy is better than 'no buddy'

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Along with a human partner option, two software-generated partners were used during Feltz's study. This image represents one of the cyber buddy options. Credit: Michigan State University



A Michigan State University researcher is looking to give exercise enthusiasts the extra nudge they need during a workout, and her latest research shows that a cyber buddy can help.

The study, which appears in the *Games for Health Journal*, is the first to indicate that although a human partner is still a better motivator during exercise, a software-generated partner also can be effective.

"We wanted to demonstrate that something that isn't real can still motivate people to give greater effort while exercising than if they had to do it by themselves," said Deborah Feltz, a University Distinguished Professor in MSU's kinesiology department who led the study with coinvestigator Brian Winn, associate professor in MSU's College of Communication Arts and Sciences.

The implications from the research also could open the door for software and video game companies to create cyber buddy programs based on sport psychology.

"Unlike many of the current game designs out there, these results could allow developers to create exercise platforms that incorporate team or partner dynamics that are based on science," said Feltz.

Using "CyBud-X," an exercise game specifically developed for Feltz's research, 120 college-aged participants were given five different isometric plank exercises to do with one of three same-sex partner choices.





Along with a human partner option, two software-generated buddies were used during Feltz's study. This image represents a nearly human partner. Credit: Michigan State University

Along with a human partner option, two software-generated buddies were used – one representing what looked to be a nearly human partner and another that looked animated. The participant and partner image were then projected onto a screen via a web camera while exercising.



The results showed that a significant motivational gain was observed in all partner conditions.

"Even though participants paired with a human partner held their planks, on average, one minute and 20 seconds longer than those with no partner, those paired with one of the software-generated buddies still held out, on average, 33 seconds longer," said Feltz.

Much of Feltz's research in this area has focused on the Köhler Motivation Effect, a phenomenon that explains why people, who may not be adept exercisers themselves, perform better with a moderately better partner or team as opposed to working out alone.

Her findings give credence that programs such as "CyBud-X" can make a difference in the way people perform.

"We know that people tend to show more effort during <u>exercise</u> when there are other partners involved because their performance hinges on how the entire team does," she said. "The fact that a nonhuman partner can have a similar effect is encouraging."

## Provided by Michigan State University

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