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Mayo Clinic shows adding activity to video games fights obesity

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If playing video games makes kids less active -- and contributes to obesity -- why not create more video games that require activity? That's the question prompted by a Mayo Clinic research study published in the current issue of the medical journal *Pediatrics*.

"We know if kids play video games that require movement, they burn more energy than they would while sitting and playing traditional screen games. That's pretty obvious even without our data," says Lorraine Lanningham-Foster, Ph.D., Mayo obesity researcher and study leader. "The point is that children -- very focused on screen games -- can be made healthier if activity is a required part of the game."

The study is the first to scientifically measure the energy spent playing video games. While the study's scope is small -- only 25 children -- it was conducted with great accuracy. Fifteen children were of normal weight for their height and frame; 10 were mildly obese. Both groups were tested while sitting and watching television, playing a traditional video game, playing two types of activity-required video games, and watching television while walking on a treadmill.

The results showed that sitting while watching television and playing traditional video games expended the same amount of energy. When participants played with the first activity-oriented video game, one that uses a camera to virtually "place" them in the game where they catch balls and other objects, their energy expenditure tripled. The result was the same for the lean and mildly obese children. Walking on a treadmill

while watching TV also tripled expenditure for the lean group, but showed a nearly fivefold increase for the mildly obese group. While using a dance video game, both groups burned the most calories, but it was considerably more for the obese group -- just over six times more than sitting still.

Screen time (both TV and video games) now averages eight hours a day among children. The Mayo researchers suggest requiring activity in more video and computer games is one potential approach for reversing the obesity trend. Despite the small sample in this study, the researchers consider the findings robust and say that they warrant further studies in randomized trials.

Source: Mayo Clinic

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