

## Fighting Fat

**New video games emerging that require children to be more active.**

**DOCTORS, EDUCATORS AND FITNESS EXPERTS** are usually quick to point to video games as a key contributor to childhood obesity, but according to a recent study conducted by the Mayo Clinic, certain types of video games may actually have the potential to effectively prevent, or even reverse, obesity in children.

Typical video games consist of handheld controllers that require no more physical activity to operate than a simple motion of the fingers. However, several game systems have emerged that require dramatically higher levels of physical activity than their handheld counterparts. Dance Dance Revolution, Sony Eye Toy and most notable, Nintendo Wii, are just a few of these new generation video games that force children to get off the couch and get active.

“The goal of the research study which we reported on in the last December issue of Pediatrics was to understand how many calories that prepubescent children ages 8 to 12-both normal weight and overweight- burn while playing traditional video games compared to more activity-promoting video games,” said Lorriane Lanningham-Foster, assistant professor of medicine for the Mayo Clinic Endocrine Research Unit.

The study consisted of measuring how many calories children burned while resting, watching a video, playing handheld video games, and playing some of the newer active video games. They also measured how many calories that children might burn if they walked on a treadmill while watching a video.

“Current research indicated that low levels of physical activity are associated with obesity,” Lanningham-Foster said. “If we can find ways for children to be more physically active, while at the same time having fun, perhaps they would be more likely to be physically active on a regular basis. To maintain a healthy weight, there must be a balance in calorie intake and calorie output. Activity-promoting video games are one way for children to be more active and help them to achieve this balance. If a child is overweight, there is also the potential for them to burn enough calories to achieve weight loss.”

So parents of children who hate sports, who may have social anxiety or who just seem to be allergic to physical activity have a new option to stay fit. Your child can receive adequate amounts of physical exercise while playing the high tech video games that capture their attention so intensely.

“If children are going to play video games, these types of games appear to be good tools for promoting healthier behavior,” Lanningham-Foster said. “I think that it is important for children to learn that being physically active can be fun- and thus make them want to be more physically active.”

