

HEALTHY LIVING

Wii Fitness: It's not just for teens

BY DANA THIMONS

Dana.Thimons@leememorial.org

Linda Kirby had never played a Wii before she picked up a controller at SHARE Club North, a local senior center for residents.

"I love it," she said, swinging her arm and simultaneously releasing the trigger on the remote to virtually knock down some pins. Unlike traditional video game systems controlled by a player's thumbs and fingers, Wii games respond to a player's body movements.

Kirby used to actively play sports before her bad hip forced her to give them up. Wii Bowling enables her to continue one of her favorite pastimes without the pain a "real" game of bowling could incite. "I can do this like I used to bowl. It keeps me up on my feet and gives me some exercise," she said.

Bowling and other sports games from Nintendo's Wii gaming system arrived at the SHARE Club North location in March, and the software — perhaps better known for getting tech-loving kids and their parents off the couch — is quickly gaining traction with seniors in Southwest Florida.

Even Nintendo has taken note of the appeal to baby boomers and older users. Though the demographic breakdown is not available at this time, said Denise Kaigler, vice president of corporate affairs for Nintendo of America. "We know a lot of senior communities are having fun with Wii."

Sue Maxwell, MSW, system director of gerontology for Lee Memorial Health System, agreed that Wii is just plain fun.

"We really feel that senior centers need to offer different opportunities for sports and physical activity other than just the usual swimming pool and pool table. Wii fills that need for something different," she said. "Besides exercise, it provides lots of opportunities for socialization and team building."

Through the use of Nintendo Wi-Fi connection, gamers can compete against others across town or across the globe. Seniors at SHARE Club North Center recently participated in a bowling tournament with seniors at an assisted living facility without ever meeting face-to-face.

"Wii enables us to build relationships with other community organizations that are similar," Maxwell said. "It's like having a bowling league without ever going to the bowling alley."

Wii Fitness may require a physician's sign-off

Seniors — and others — should observe a few simple precautions when starting a Wii fitness or sports regime. "For people who have never participated in formal exercise or those older



COURTESY PHOTOS

Seniors at SHARE Club North Center recently participated in a bowling tournament using the Nintendo Wii gaming system.

than 40, it is best to check with your physician first to make sure your heart is healthy enough to participate before starting any exercise program," said Dr. Salvatore Lacagnina, Medical Director of Lee Physician Group and the Cape Coral Wellness Center. He encourages people who have been sedentary to start at a low intensity and progress slowly until they've become used to the game.

Gaming systems could mean added years to your life.

Wii is one way to get 30 minutes of exercise per day, as recommended by the American Heart Association.

"If unable to do other exercises or get to the gym, this type of individualized computer program is a great way to do something physical," said Dr. Lacagnina. "Anything that gets people off the couch and moving is a step in the right direction."

Wii is also useful for maintaining memory.

"Anything that gets your attention is better than something you get bored with. Research has shown that video and computer games interest people," said Dr. Michael Raab, a local geriatrician who works with Lee Memory Care.



Nintendo's Wii gaming system.

The new Wii Fit program rolled out about a year ago and involves a pressure-sensitive balance board and comes with 40 exercise-oriented games, including yoga, soccer and ski-jumping.

"Wii Fit will tell you how long it's been since you logged in last and gives you computerized encouragement. So Wii has the interest factor and the record keeping ability," Dr. Raab said.

"Regular exercise can help with balance, cardiovascular health and strength," Dr. Raab said. "In addition, people who participate in regular physical activity experience less memory loss over time." ■

Ten Super Foods for Good Health

With all the media attention on healthy eating these days, it's hard to keep track of the latest and greatest tips for sustaining your body with good nutrition. Elizabeth McCormick, a registered dietitian with the Lee Center for Weight Management, suggests the following 10 foods as excellent nutritional staples for a healthy diet and shares a few of the reasons that these choices make the "super food" list:

- **Salmon**
Salmon is a great source of omega-3 fats. "Omega-3s are essential fatty acids that are proven to help lower triglycerides, prevent heart arrhythmias and decrease inflammation," Ms. McCormick said.

- **Spinach**
Spinach is very high in iron, as well as vitamins A and C, which are both powerful antioxidants. "These antioxidants can help lower your risk for certain diseases and cancers," Ms. McCormick said.

- **Legumes**
Beans in general are a good source of soluble fiber and can help lower your cholesterol and your risk for heart disease. Beans are also a great source of protein and complex carbohydrates, so they provide your body with steady energy.



- **Eggs**
Eggs are economical, versatile and nutritious. They're low in calories, and they have all the essential amino acids, so they serve as a complete protein.

- **Almonds**
Almonds are a healthy source of monounsaturated fat. They contain a lot of vitamin E, another powerful antioxidant. Creating your own 100-calorie almond pack is a healthy snack idea.

- **Low-fat or fat-free yogurt**
Low-fat or fat-free yogurt is an excellent source of protein, and it also contains healthy bacteria, which can promote good digestion and boost immunity.

- **Berries**
Berries are packed with antioxidants and are low in calories. They are also high in water and fiber, which keeps you feeling full longer.

- **Oatmeal**
The soluble fiber in oatmeal can help lower your cholesterol and keep you feeling full longer.

- **Sweet Potatoes**
Sweet potatoes have a large amount of vitamin A, which can help decrease your risk of cataracts, and potassium, which can help lower blood pressure.

- **Kiwi**
One kiwi provides almost 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C.

Don't want to completely skip your favorite foods? Then try small changes at first, like using almonds on your salad instead of croutons. Small changes can also help you sustain healthy eating longer. Try adding in a different "super food" to your diet every day. ■

About Wii

- ▶ Nintendo released the Wii gaming system in November 2006.

- ▶ About 19.6 million consoles have been sold in the U.S.

- ▶ Among the Wii sports available are tennis, baseball, golf, bowling and boxing.

- ▶ Wii Fit, launched in May 2008, involves a pressure-sensitive balance board and comes with 40 exercise-oriented games, including yoga, ski-jumping and hula-hooping. ■