

Get Fit with Ring-Fit Adventure™: Physiological Outcomes of a Novel Active Video Game Intervention among Women

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Abstract

Introduction: The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the Nintendo Switch™ active video game, Ring Fit Adventure™, on body composition, muscular strength, and cardiorespiratory endurance in adult women.

Methods: 15 adult women participated in Ring Fit Adventure™ gameplay twice a week, for 45 minutes over eight weeks (total of 16 sessions). Body composition was measured by the iDexa, muscular strength was assessed by the handgrip test, and cardiorespiratory endurance was measured by the YMCA step test.

Results: Paired samples t-tests from pre-post revealed a significant increase in lean mass ($p = 0.02$), and bone mineral density ($p = 0.01$). There was a non-significant decrease in fat mass ($p = 0.35$). A significant increase was noted for dominant handgrip ($p < 0.001$), non-dominant handgrip strength ($p = 0.001$), and a significant increase in heart rate recovery ($p = 0.001$).

Conclusions: A short-term intervention utilizing Ring Fit Adventure™ resulted in significant body composition and fitness changes for adult women. Future studies would benefit from diversifying the sample and exploring the benefits of an at-home intervention.

Keywords: Exergames; Fitness; Body Composition; Women; Adult; Serious Games

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Introduction

Over the last decade, active video games (AVGs) have emerged as a unique opportunity to merge popular entertainment with potential health benefits. AVGs prompt physical activity or exercise through interactive gameplay [1]. As almost 277 million Americans play video games, and over 75% of adult gamers spend at least three hours a week playing video games in the United States [2], AVGs provide an opening for exercise within the home. Furthermore, AVGs may be more important as we see the effects of social distancing restrictions and loss of physical activity opportunities due to COVID-19 [3-7].

As to the effects of previous AVGs on physiological parameters, the literature is mixed. According to a meta-analysis, AVGs were effective in increasing light-to-moderate physical activity and were comparable to traditional physical activities among mostly young populations [8]. In contrast, another meta-analysis found that AVGs had little impact on weight among youth [9]. Another review among youth and young adults found that while AVGs are a healthier alternative to sedentary behavior, the case for large impacts on physical activity and body composition has not been substantiated [10]. It is also evident that adult populations

are often ignored in the literature as very few studies exist outside of short-term measures of energy expenditure, neglecting changes in body composition, physical fitness, and physical activity over time [11,12].

Although the popularity of AVGs on home consoles appeared to peak with Wii Fit™ on the Nintendo Wii™ [13], a new AVG titled Ring Fit Adventure™ played on the Nintendo Switch™ is starting to challenge that narrative. The Nintendo Wii, Nintendo's previous best-selling home console, sold about 101 million units, with Wii Fit selling over 22 million units [13]. The Nintendo Switch™ has now surpassed the Nintendo Wii with 114.33 million units sold as of September 2022 [14]. Ring Fit Adventure™ is closing in on the total sales of Wii Fit with about 15 million units sold despite only being on the marketplace for 3 years [14]. Wii Fit was a cultural and video game sales phenomenon, and we are witnessing a similar occasion once again. Ring Fit Adventure™ is a unique game that uses a ring, similar to a Pilates ring, for resistance in numerous upper and lower body exercises. The intensity and difficulty of the exercises increase as the levels are surpassed. Throughout the gameplay, exercises are detailed in written and visual demonstrations. Only two studies have investigated the Ring Fit Adventure™. One



conducted among children found it to require higher levels of energy expenditure compared to the Nintendo Wii, dance mats, and Xbox Kinect [15]. The other study examined patients with chronic low back pain and found Ring Fit Adventure™ increased pain self-efficacy and reduced pain [16]. As minimal data exist on the physiological effects of Ring Fit Adventure™ on body composition and fitness parameters, further investigation is required. Therefore, the purpose of this intervention was to investigate the impact of Ring Fit Adventure™ on body composition, muscular strength, and heart rate recovery over an eight-week intervention. This intervention also had the goal of detailing physical activity during the gameplay sessions utilizing an accelerometer. Finally, while many feel video games are primarily played by young boys, the average age for a video game player is 31 years old and 45% of those who play games are female in the United States [2]. In addition to this, it appears obesity impacts females at a higher rate than males globally. It was estimated that 15% of all females were obese in 2016 compared with 11% of males [17]. One study also found that a staggering 87% of 151 countries included in analysis showed a higher female obesity prevalence compared with males [18]. However, 31.7% of women are inactive while 23.4% of men are inactive globally [19]. Therefore, we decided to purposely sample adult women.

Methods

This single-armed study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects and followed the standards set by the Declaration of Helsinki under protocol 21-001 MR 2101. Each participant read and signed a written informed consent and completed the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q). Participants had to answer “no” to all questions on the PAR-Q to participate in the intervention.

Participants

Participants were recruited by word of mouth, e-mail, flyers, and social network blasts within the community with a three-week window to join the study. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be: female, low risk for medical complications from exercise (as determined by the PAR-Q), currently not exercising, and not pregnant. A total of 15 female subjects were screened, found to be eligible, and consented to participate in this study. Table 1 displays demographic information at baseline.

Procedure

Prior to the intervention, participants were assessed for height, weight, body composition, muscular strength, and heart rate recovery. After pre-testing, all participants selected a schedule to allow them to participate in the Ring Fit Adventure™ game twice a week over eight weeks at a university laboratory. Each appointment lasted approximately 45 minutes with the inclusion of a warm-up, gameplay, and cool-down. All aspects were led by the in-game Ring-Fit Adventure™ avatar. After the warm-up, participants were guided through a course requiring

them to jog/run with the addition of physical challenges involving the use of the resistance ring throughout. In addition, they were presented with challenges mid-course consisting of upper-body, lower-body, and core exercises using the resistance ring. The workout gameplay was approximately 35 minutes for each session. After each workout, the cool-down was completed. The potential dose of the intervention was 720 minutes over 16 sessions (16 sessions X 45 minutes).

Body Composition

The iDexa was utilized to measure body composition in a fasted state (no nutritional intake for the prior eight hours) by trained personnel. The iDexa measures body composition and bone density by dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry which provides accurate data related to body composition in terms of body fat, lean mass, bone mineral density (BMD), and exact data from regions of the body if necessary [20,21]. Specifically, variables of interest for this study include lean mass (kg), fat mass (kg), and bone mineral density (g/cm^2). According to previous studies, the precision error for total body mass was 0.9%, total body lean mass was 0.4-0.5%, total bone mineral content was 0.6%, fat mass was 0.7-0.8%, and percent body fat was 0.6-0.9%, which are all considered to be excellent [22-24].

Muscular Strength

To assess muscle strength, participants completed a handgrip strength test during pre- and post-testing [25]. The handgrip dynamometer is a non-invasive and portable device used to assess muscular strength measured as a force in kilograms. After being adjusted specifically for each participant’s hand size, participants were instructed to squeeze the handgrip dynamometer using as much force as possible. In a standing position with both arms by their sides, the handgrip was measured three times in both the right and left hands in an alternating manner between the two sides. The highest force in kilograms for each hand was used for analysis.

Heart Rate Recovery

The YMCA step test was used to assess heart rate recovery. This test was conducted primarily due to social distancing requirements as this data was collected during Spring 2021 when social distancing was required by university mandates. The YMCA step test has been validated and recommended for situations where time or resources are limited [26]. Participants stepped on and off a 30.5 cm (12 inches) step 24 times per minute for 3 minutes. They were aided in this endeavor by an electronic metronome set at 96 beats per minute which they were to match with 96 steps (24 ascent-descent cycles) per minute. At one-minute intervals participants were told “you are doing well” and the time remaining was indicated. After the completion of the test, participants were instructed to sit down and relax for one minute. Then, the participant’s heart rate was obtained with the polar heart rate monitor (Polar Electro, USA) [27].

Accelerometry

To determine physical activity levels during gameplay, participants wore an ActiGraph GT3X+ tri-axial accelerometer (ActiGraph corp, Pensacola, FL, USA) on their right hip. Physical activity was assessed for both sessions during weeks one, four, and eight for a total of six measurements. Data were downloaded in 60-second epochs and scored using adult cut points [28]. The researcher’s analyzed time spent in light, moderately vigorous, and very vigorous activity during gameplay across the intervention.

Table 1: Means (standard deviations) and percentages for demographic variables at baseline.

Variable	(n = 15)
Age (yrs)	45.93
BMI kg/m ²	31.88
% White	80%
% Black	13.3%
% Asian	6.7%

BMI = Body Mass Index



Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed with SPSS 26. Paired sample t-tests assessed differences in body composition, muscular strength, and heart rate recovery from pre- to post-test. Changes in physical activity during gameplay were assessed with repeated measures of ANOVA. Physical activity was measured at weeks one, four, and eight. G*power indicated a required sample size of 16 and was used to calculate post hoc power analysis for the paired t-test [29]. Probability values of $p < 0.05$ were considered significant.

Results

All 15 subjects were placed in the intervention after completing the informed consent process. One subject declined to attend post-testing. Therefore, the final analysis included 14 subjects. Participants attended an average of 15 out of 16 sessions. The minimum number of sessions attended was 13 while the maximum was 16.

Body Composition

Table 2 displays mean scores for pre- and post-testing body composition variables. A significant increase was noted for lean mass ($M = 0.70$ kgs, $t(13) = 2.64$, $p = 0.02$) and BMD ($M = 0.03$, $t(13) = 3.26$, $p = 0.01$). There was a non-significant decrease in fat mass ($M = -0.38$ kgs, $t(13) = -0.98$, $p = 0.35$). Observed power for body composition ranged from 0.24 to 0.92. Power was less than the recommended .80 for fat mass (.24) and BF% (.76).

Fitness

Table 2 displays mean scores for pre- and post-testing fitness variables. A significant increase was noted for dominant handgrip strength ($M = 2.31$ kg, $t(13) = 6.54$, $p < 0.001$), and (in non-dominant handgrip strength ($M = 1.75$ kg, $t(13) = 4.51$, $p = 0.001$). A significant increase was noted for heart rate recovery ($M = 9.86$, $t(13) = 4.10$, $p = 0.001$). Observed power for fitness measures ranged from 0.98 to 1.00.

Physical Activity

Accelerometer data revealed participants stayed primarily in light physical activity during sessions. Figure 1 displays mean physical activity levels during weeks one, four, and eight. Repeated measures ANOVA determined no significant changes in light ($F(2, 26) = 1.81$, $p = 0.183$) or moderate ($F(2, 26) = 0.716$, $p = 0.498$) physical activity levels across eight weeks. As vigorous and very vigorous physical activity violated the assumption of sphericity, a Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used. Furthermore, repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction determined no significant changes in vigorous ($F(1.996, 25.948) = 2.629$, $p = 0.091$) or very vigorous ($F(1.210, 15.736) = 1.515$, $p = 0.242$) physical activity levels across eight weeks.

Figure displays A) Light, B) Moderate, C) Vigorous, and D) Very Vigorous physical activity levels across eight weeks.

Discussion

Body Composition

These results establish strong potential of Ring-Fit Adventure for various physiological outcomes among women, even after limited use. This intervention demonstrated a significant increase ($M = 0.70$ kgs, 1.61%) in lean mass, a significant decrease in body fat% ($M = 0.81\%$), and a non-significant decrease in fat mass ($M = -0.38$ kgs, -1.04%). Only three studies were identified that examined changes in body composition among adults playing AVGs. Bock BC, et al. (2019) [30], conducted a three-arm RCT, 12-week, 3 day/week with 50 minutes of game play among middle aged adults (79% females) and found a significant reduction in body fat% for AVG compared to a control group [30]. Although this study used the iDexa, comparisons are difficult as Bock utilized an adjustment model to calculate body composition differences, with no clear definition on what or how adjustments were made [30]. Owens SG, et al. (2011) [31], (9 adults, 3 months, at home use (no directive)) found a non-significant decrease (.2%) in body fat% utilizing bioelectrical impedance [31]. Warburton DE, et al. (2007) [32], conducted a six-week, three-day/week, 30 minutes per session AVG study among 14 ($n = 7$ AVG, $n = 7$ control) college males [32]. Utilizing bioelectrical impedance, the results showed a 1kg reduction in fat mass and no change in lean mass, resulting in no significant changes in body fat percentage. While it is difficult to draw conclusions based on these limited findings, our results indicate Ring Fit Adventure™ impacts body composition in a more positive manner compared to previous studies in the literature. As there is a direct link between fat

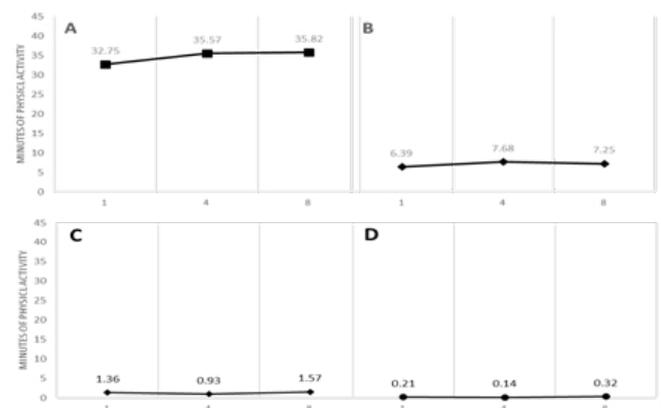


Figure 1: Physical activity levels across weeks one, four, and eight.

Table 2: Mean scores (standard deviations).

Variable	Pre	Post	<i>p</i>	Effect size (Cohen's <i>D</i>)	Power
Body Composition					
Fat Mass (kgs)	36.18 (18.43)	35.80 (18.79)	0.35	0.26	0.24
Lean Mass (kgs)	43.64 (9.14)	44.34 (9.24)	0.02*	0.71	0.81
BF%	43.47 (7.37)	42.66 (7.64)	0.03*	0.67	0.76
BMD	1.19 (.18)	1.22 (.18)	0.01*	0.87	0.92
Fitness Variables					
HR Recovery	126.79 (15.17)	116.93 (10.85)	0.001*	1.07	0.98
HG Dom	25.96 (6.53)	28.28 (6.96)	0.000**	1.75	1.00
HG Non-Dom	24.35 (5.81)	26.10 (6.01)	0.001*	1.21	0.99

*Denotes a significant change ($p < 0.05$). **Denotes value less than 0.001. BF=Body fat, BMD=Bone mineral density, HR=heart rate, HG=hand grip, Dom=dominant



mass, lean mass, and mortality [33], more research is needed on the impact of exergaming and Ring Fit Adventure™ on body composition.

Fitness

We could only identify two interventions that included various fitness measures after an AVG intervention [31,32]. One study found that after three months of at home use of Wii Fit, nine adults had no significant changes in pushups and peak VO₂ [31]. Warburton DE, et al. (2007) [32], conducted a three-day/six-week intervention utilizing interactive video gaming combined with stationary cycling among 14 college students in a randomized controlled trial [32]. There was a significant increase in VO₂max in the video game group, (11±5.1%), a non-significant increase of 2 kg in grip strength, and a significant increase in leg power and vertical jump. Our results found an increase ($M = 2.31$ kg, 8.9%) for dominant handgrip strength and non-dominant handgrip strength ($M = 1.75$ kg, 7.2%), as well as an increase in heart rate recovery ($M = 9.07$, 7.2%). These results point to Ring Fit Adventure™ having potential for fitness outcomes despite only encompassing 16 sessions over eight weeks.

Physical Activity

The literature is mixed when it comes to the potential of AVGs impact on physical activity. Based on the accelerometer data, participants in the current study participated in light physical activity for an average of 34.71 minutes during a 45-minute session. Furthermore, it is evident that physical activity levels did not significantly differ across eight weeks. The accelerometer findings from this study support the current literature which suggests that while AVGs are effective in promoting physical activity, they may not meet the intensity levels needed for health benefits [34-36]. It is possible that placing the accelerometer on the hip did not accurately estimate the intensity of the resistance exercise, particularly upper body exercises. This thought is present primarily due to the changes in body composition. Future studies should consider multiple placements of accelerometers and/or measuring energy expenditure via indirect calorimetry. This method has been utilized in previous studies among adults and may provide more information on the intensity of the Ring Fit Adventure™ game [11,37-39].

Limitations

The largest limitation with this intervention is the small sample size which confines the generalizations that can be made. In addition to this, with power lacking for fat mass (0.24), the sample size may have hindered our ability to detect a significant difference for this measure. The lack of a control group also limits the inferences that can be made regarding these results. In keeping accordance with social distancing guidelines, we were limited on the number of participants and thus experimental conditions. Future interventions would benefit by focusing on increasing sample size and randomly assigning participants to experimental conditions. Although purposefully, this intervention was made up entirely of a female sample, which also limits generalizations. Future interventions may focus on adding male participants, and perhaps participants across the age span. Another limitation was the lack of measurement for physical activity and nutrition outside of the intervention. While we asked the participants to maintain their current eating habits and physical activity levels outside of the study, it cannot be ruled out that potential changes in habit influenced the results.

Conclusion

Ring Fit Adventure™ demonstrated a significant impact in multiple body composition and fitness variables over eight weeks and 16

sessions. This may be applicable to health professionals looking for a recommendation for an at-home workout option. To support these findings, future studies should also focus on increasing and diversifying the sample, increasing the duration of the study, and conducting interventions within the home setting to determine adherence outside of a laboratory.

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