

A young man enjoys the latest hit exercise game from Japan

Exercising for Fun with Video Games

An adventure-style home video game that lets players enjoy an adventure story where they save the world from evil while doing a full-body workout has gained widespread popularity in Japan and around the world. While people spend more time at home as a measure to prevent COVID-19 coronavirus infections, some are likely playing the game to remedy their lack of exercise.

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AN exercise-based game title released in October 2019 by Japanese video game company Nintendo has gained popularity in Japan and abroad. The game is *Ring Fit Adventure*, and its biggest feature is that the movements of the player enjoying the game take the form of exercise.

“I bought it to deal with my lack of exercise. I’d been wanting it for a while, but it was hard to get hold of. I finally got my hands on a copy in May,” explains Tango Makoto, an office worker living in



The Ring-Con and Leg Strap accessories for *Ring Fit Adventure* (left); players progress through the game using body movements (right)



All photos: © 2019 Nintendo

Shibata City, Niigata Prefecture. Since getting the game, Tango has been enjoying it together with his wife and daughter, who is in the second grade of elementary school. “Children are at home on weekdays due to school closures, and there are fewer opportunities to go out on the weekends as well. This is something I can enjoy playing with my daughter, and it also deals with the lack of exercise. My daughter is especially good at the knee crunches exercise. She’s so fast that I can’t compete with her,” smiles Tango.

Players operate the game by holding a steering wheel-shaped device called a Ring-Con in both hands, and wrapping a Leg Strap around one of their legs. The player is synced with the character on the screen and jogs in a virtual space. When enemies appear on the screen, the player can defeat them by moving according to the on-screen instructions. For example, when being attacked by an enemy, a player might need to tense up their abdominal muscles and push against their stomach with the Ring-Con tilted horizontally. In this way, a player exercises the whole body by moving in different ways through the game.

The jogging and fitness boom has been continuing in Japan since the 1970s. But even though people know how important exercise is for their health and take up some form of exercise, some find it hard to stick with it. This game does a great job winning over that crowd.

“There was something accessible about this game because it involves exercises you can do at home, and the adventure elements were also appealing. I actually enjoyed it,” says Tango. His wife agrees, saying, “The fact that you can have fun while continuing to exercise in a casual way is good. I still have fun playing with my daughter, but when everyone goes to bed, I also have a go at it by myself.”

Nintendo was founded in 1889 as a producer of traditional Japanese playing cards known as *Hanafuda*. In the years since, it has continued to provide entertainment that can be enjoyed by the whole family. The Nintendo Entertainment System home video game console and exclusive game titles released in 1983 became worldwide hits. The company released the *Wii* console that can be played with intuitive



Early incarnation Nintendo video game console and *Super Mario Bros.* game screenshot

controls in 2006. In addition to ever-popular game franchises including *Mario* and *Zelda*, Nintendo has continued to work on games such as *Wii Fit* and *Wii Fit U* that let family members enjoy casual exercise on a daily basis. Nintendo’s latest title allowing people to have fun while exercising regardless of gender or age is the culmination of development capabilities supported by that legacy.

The game has also had an unforeseen effect on Tango.

“Actually, since I started playing this game I’ve been worried about my weight as an indicator of health, and I’ve started to weigh myself daily,” he reveals.

As we approach an era in which people typically live to a hundred, staying healthy is something of interest to everyone. Regardless of age or gender, engaging in fitness activities while enjoying yourself may further heighten families’ interest in health. **1**