

Game Review: 'Wii Fit Plus'

October 15 2009, By Kyle Orland



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Title: "[Wii](#) Fit Plus"

Nutshell: "Wii Fit Plus" is more fun than "Wii Fit." But is it much more fun than a workout?

What's Hot: Robust, easy-to-control Snowball Fight, Obstacle Course, Skateboarding and more

What's Not: Not quite enough depth to stay fresh through months of workouts

Crispy Gamer Says... Try

Making exercise less boring. For millions of gamers, this was the promise of the original "Wii Fit." Sure, the game and its scale-like Balance Board controller could guide and grade you through simple yoga poses and strength-training exercises. But those sections of the game largely replicated exercises you could learn easily from a book or an exercise video.

The real appeal of the original "Wii Fit" -- the thing that made it unique -- was found in the [Aerobics](#) and Balance Games sections, where the game promised to distract and entertain even as it provided a full-body workout. For a generation that grew up controlling on-screen characters with their thumbs, this new mixture of gaming and exercise had the potential to be a hell of a lot more interesting than jogging on a treadmill for an hour.

But most of the games in "Wii Fit" had a crucial problem: They were shallow. Extremely shallow, for the most part. While they held up decently well for the first few hours, few had enough depth to sustain a gamer's interest for the weeks and weeks of regular exercise that make up a regular fitness regimen. It only took one or two play sessions to master the art of launching off a virtual ski jump or walking across a virtual tightrope or twirling a virtual hula hoop, or most of the other one-note activities presented in "Wii Fit." After that, the games had roughly the same entertainment value as a stationary exercise bike (which provides a much more robust workout, by the way). The concept of "making exercise less boring" only works if the games themselves aren't, you know, boring.

Twenty million sales later, Nintendo is doing its best to address this problem with "Wii Fit Plus." Yes, the [Yoga](#) and Strength Training sections are still there, expanded with new exercises and even the option

to build full, customized workouts. But the focus is on the 15 new game-like activities in the "Training Plus" section, designed to give new life to the concept of entertaining exercise.

Many of them are still too simple to stay interesting past the first couple of attempts. At the bottom of the interest pile are the bicycling and jogging "games," which are less about strategy and reflexes than about aimlessly wandering around Wuhu Island. Just above those are Perfect 10, a game that uses hip thrusts to add simple sums; and Tilt City, a ball-sorting game where both the Balance Board and Wii Remote are used to control tiltable ramps. For anyone who's graduated elementary school, though, these two will most likely remain curiosities.

A few of "Wii Fit Plus" mini-games try to spice up the exercise by infusing it with a sense of rhythm: Rhythm Kung Fu combines timed steps on the Balance Board with Remote and Nunchuk punches; Rhythm Parade lets you lead a marching band with a steady cadence and occasional shakes of the Remote/Nunchuk; and Juggler asks you to stay balanced on a large circus ball while using your hands to keep a set of balls aloft. The gentle beat of these games briefly distracts from the mild workout they provide, but the limited selection of slow, repetitive rhythms is likely to bore even moderate fans of other rhythm games.

But it's not all shallow pap. A few of the "fresh 15" require enough strategy and dexterity to remain compelling as games, not just as excuses to exercise. They achieve this, primarily, not by emulating real-world activities but by emulating other games. Snowball Fight, for instance, has players leaning around barriers and aiming shots with the Wii Remote in a way not dissimilar to Namco's Time Crisis. Bird's Eye Bull's Eye uses novel, surprisingly functional arm-flapping controls to guide a chicken-suited Mii onto a series of Pilotwings-style landing targets. Skateboarding provides a relatively full-featured and surprisingly easy-to-control Tony Hawk-alike, complete with jumps, grinds and mid-air

tricks. And Driving Range actually expands on games like Tiger Woods, basing your swing quality on upper-body form and timing but also on lower-body shifts in weight.

All these games provide novel and functional Balance Board adaptations of existing game genres. But "Wii Fit Plus" most impressive appropriation might be the Obstacle Course, a basic run-and-jump platform game controlled by real running and "jumping" (actually bending and lifting onto your tiptoes, but the difference is largely academic). While there aren't any Goombas or Koopa Troopas about, the few courses provide the sorts of moving platforms, conveyer belts, icy surfaces and rolling obstacles you might expect to see in a Mario game. For a platform-game veteran like me, the experience felt at once familiar and welcome but also totally fresh, thanks to the new full-body control method.

In the week or so I've had to evaluate "Wii Fit Plus," these mini-games have made my early morning workouts feel like a joy rather than a chore. For the most part, the games are so engaging that I don't notice the sweat on my brow until I'm forced to take a break between them. Which is how it should be. The question, then, is whether they'll remain as interesting over the six months I've given myself to drop 12 pounds (the amount the game says I need to lose to get to my ideal weight).

It's hard to evaluate at this point, but I'm already beginning to lose interest in Snowball Fight now that the artificial intelligence's general patterns are getting burned into my brain. I'm well on my way to figuring out the optimal path through the three Bird's Eye Bull's Eye courses, too, and I'm fast approaching four-star status on even the hardest Obstacle Course. Granted, there's still ample room for improvement in Skateboarding and the Driving Range, but with another week of practice I'm expecting those to become as functionally "solved" as the others. Sure, I could try to beat my own high scores at each of these games, and

the attempts would probably be mildly diverting for a while longer. But eventually -- give it a month at the outside -- I see myself getting utterly bored and placing the Balance Board in the closet yet again.

The games themselves are all well-designed and fun to play. It's the limited set of levels and challenges that limit the long-term appeal. I'd happily Snowball Fight my way through a variety of icy environments and enemies, rather than the single locale and two opponent types. I'd gladly flap my arms off through dozens of different target arrangements in Bird's Eye Bull's Eye. I'd be a happy man if I could jog my way through hundreds of varied Obstacle Courses, skate through an open world, or use my golf swing on real courses rather than just a driving range. Unfortunately, I can't do any of that. "Wii Fit Plus" seems perfectly content to present these thoughtfully designed games, give them excellent controls and great presentation, then leave them to languish with a severe lack of the variety and depth they need in order to endure.

Perhaps I'm asking too much from a game that manages to pack in so many new, diverse and interesting uses for the Balance Board. But the core fitness concept of this game requires it to remain original and engaging when played daily for months on end. And I'm sorry, but that means having more than three basic Skateboarding courses. I also want other common, modern-day features that might extend the experience, like online high-score tables, robust multiplayer, course editors, achievements, etc. Without these, "Wii Fit Plus" still feels more like a multi-faceted technical demonstration than a fully realized game.

I still can't shake the feeling that Nintendo is still trying to prove the Balance Board's potential to other developers rather than taking the plunge and delivering on that potential itself. But Nintendo's proven time and time again over the decades that it can make deep games with dozens of hours of varied gameplay. With "[Wii Fit](#) Plus," it stops

frustratingly short of proving it again.

This review is based on a retail copy of the game provided by the publisher.

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