

# 4 Ways Video Games Are Good For You

Ask your grandkids to pass the video game controller – it's your turn to be youthful.

Although you may scoff at how often your grandchildren play video games, it might be time to join in on the fun. Several studies suggest that video games could be an excellent way to improve memory, mood, and overall longevity.

Often considered to have a negative effect on children's health because it reduces physical activity, playing video games can actually be good for seniors in several ways:

## 1. Improve Memory and Sustained Attention Skills

Cognitive function often becomes impaired or begins to decline as



we age, and researchers think it's because the connections between your brain cells are changing. But keeping your mind engaged, stimulated, and active can help improve brain health. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco developed a special 3D racecar video game called NeuroRacer that tested players' ability to keep an eye out for a specific type of road sign while racing. The 2013 study published in Nature found that seniors who played the game for 12 hours over the span of a month eventually outperformed young adults who played the game for the first time. What's more, the players' newfound skill wasn't lost over time; the seniors were just as good at the game six months later. This suggests that video games can help keep the brain active and improve important cognitive functions – such as memory and the ability to pay attention – for the long term.

## 2. Reduce Feelings of Depression and Loneliness

Older adults can get a mood boost from picking up a video game controller, too. A 2010 study presented at the Gerontological Society of America's Annual Scientific Meeting

found that seniors who played Nintendo Wii for an hour a week reported being in a more positive mood and having fewer feelings of loneliness than seniors who watched television for the same amount of time. Another 2010 study from the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine concluded that one-third of participants who played an exercise game on the Wii reported a 50 percent or greater reduction in depressive symptoms.

### 3. Better Balance and Reflexes

Although it may seem like more of a muscular or skeletal issue, walking and staying upright is affected by your brain health. A 2013 study from the University of Illinois at Chicago found that seniors who played computer games had better balance and an improved gait than those who did not play. The computer games used in the study focused on improving memory, spatial navigation, and decision-making skills. The older adults who played the brain-training games could stand up and walk faster than the control subjects in the study, which also reduces the likelihood of falling and getting injured.

### 4. Enhance Vision

Despite the commonly-held belief that screens hurt your eyes, video and computer games might actually improve your vision. A 2012 study published in *Seeing and Perceiving* found that seniors with cataracts who played first-person shooter games such as Call of Duty or Halo for a month showed signs of improved vision: they could make out small print and recognize faces more easily. First-person shooter games force players to move their eyes quickly to track objects and react to sudden events in the game, and are also believed to increase dopamine and adrenaline, both of which help keep the brain active.

### Which Video Games Should You Play?

A variety of games, with different speeds, skills, and rules are good for healthy aging, as they use different parts of the brain and body.

There are sports games, like Wii Sports and Wii Sports Resort, that require a good deal of spatial skills and some physical ability. For fitness video games, there's the Wii Fit, a fun way to get exercise and perfect for seniors who may just be getting off the couch

– you can do yoga and other exercises to improve balance, all while standing in front of your TV.

EA Active is another fitness video game that can help seniors get physically active while stimulating their brains. Strategy games are good for brain stimulation – one North Carolina State University study had participants play Rise of Nations, a strategy-based computer game, and found that seniors who played it showed improved cognitive function and memory.

### Other Mental Activities for Healthy Aging

If video games aren't your thing, experts also recommend these activities to keep your mind healthy and engaged:

- Doing daily crossword, Sudoku, or similar puzzles
- Going to the theater or listening to lectures
- Taking a class just for fun at a local community college to learn something new
- Reading and writing
- Challenging your spouse, friend, neighbor, or grandchild to play a board game

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