

MultiBall 'exergames' provide fun and fitness to senior community

Estelle Futterman has spent her entire life being active and athletic.

Golf.

Tennis.

Basketball and handball.

You name the sport, she's tried it — and likely excelled at it.

But this lifelong exercise enthusiast admits that, in the last few years, she's been forced to learn to live with some athletic limitations.

"I used to be able to play 18 holes of golf — but now I'll play nine," says the 86-year-old Futterman. "Maintaining my cardio fitness has become harder as I age."

Fortunately for Futterman — and the rest of her fellow residents at Sinai Residences in Boca Raton — the community recently installed a unique, high-tech, digital "exergaming" and fitness platform called MultiBall — or, as residents have taken to calling it, "wall ball."

MultiBall describes itself as "a mixed reality sports and gaming platform built for the interaction between physical activity and digital games."

All Futterman knows is that the games are fun, accessible and a great workout.

"MultiBall provides a very good cardio workout," she says. "It's great for quick, short bursts of energy. I do get out of breath, but then stop, sit down, and start again."

Futterman likes the workout her brain gets too: "It's been good for my memory and focus."

Having to think while exercising and moving means she experiences what she calls "good distractions. It's more stimulating than simply walking on a treadmill."

Fellow resident Stanley Rothman concurs. The 94-year-old Rothman, who goes to the community's gym five days a week, has played MultiBall regularly since the platform was installed and plans to continue doing so.

"I think MultiBall is terrific. It's mind and body working together. You're activating both at the same time, which keeps you moving and thinking. My goal is to increase my efficiency every time I do it."

Here's how MultiBall works:

- Users stand in front of a screen where they can interact directly with the software.

- Some games involve balls. Others, such as "Ghosting," track walking distance and help with balance, agility and directional changes.

- Interactive components help with cognitive skill development and precision training.

- Fitness workouts teach body balance and coordination.

- Brain-stimulating games include "Quiz Game" trivia and "Memory Game" match cards. Both require mobility because users have to walk. Those who need walkers, wheelchairs or any assistive devices can still participate.

MultiBall has been installed at facilities all over the world — including at athletic training academies where elite athletes can hone their skills in a variety of sports.

According to company representatives in Germany, where MultiBall was created, Sinai Residences is the first senior living community in the U.S. to offer the product.

Pam Longin, Sinai Residences' wellness specialist, is encouraged by the response the community has had to MultiBall.

"This is really technology with a learning curve," she explains. "We are gradually getting more and more residents comfortable with it, and once they start, they are finding it to be fun and challenging."

She notes that "many of our residents are exhausted after finishing but don't realize how much they were moving during the game. That's because playing the game is distracting. Many of them also love it because they can do it in an open, ventilated space alone."

Another benefit of MultiBall's technology is that it's adaptable for people of all strength and fitness levels.

"For those who are already in shape and exercise a lot, it is still a great challenge," says Longin. "It gets progressively harder as you ascend from one level to the next."

Conversely, for people who have been previously sedentary and/or don't like exercising, the stimulation of the games can help alleviate boredom and "trick" them into moving more.

No matter a user's goal(s), MultiBall can help meet them, says Longin.

"For example, Stanley uses MultiBall to practice his agility. The technology tracks his movement and he gains confidence and improves his ability to move in different ways, such as bending down and standing back up or walking backwards."

Longin believes other benefits include:

- Improved hand-eye coordination.
- Improved focus and cognition, especially in reading instructions.
- Improved balance, agility and endurance.

"MultiBall brings all of these components together," she says. "Instead of residents just mindlessly walking on a treadmill, they can use their minds while exercising."

Eventually, Longin would like residents who are dealing with Parkinson's disease to use MultiBall. "We want to try to have them stand up from their chairs and touch the screen."

Longin envisions a day in the not-too-distant future when the huge MultiBall screen will become daily gathering spot.

"We want to have residents come down on their own and use it throughout the day," she says. "I'd love to see groups

of friends come down to the fitness center and have a good time playing with MultiBall — as opposed to just having them sit around playing cards."

Rachel Blumberg, executive director of Sinai Residences, says the exergames are helping many of her community's residents embrace active lifestyles, which has become more challenging in the era of COVID: "Instead of sitting and

playing a board game, MultiBall offers our residents a fun and easy way to move around, bend over and stand up. They are having a blast and absolutely loving this new innovative way of exercising safely during the pandemic."

Rothman, the 94-year-old workout aficionado, puts it more simply: "It's fun, motivating — and doesn't feel like exercise."