How we exercised during quarantine

With all the mental burdens that came with living in 2020 — including gyms closing their doors — many have found it tough to get in their normal level of exercise. Here at *The Verge*, we coped with this as you might expect: with tech that could enable or motivate us to get some activity in. These are the gadgets, apps, games, and services we used to work up a sweat while still staying safe, and which might prove useful if your New Year's resolution involves exercise.

Beat Saber

[embedded content]

I named *Beat Saber* my favorite game of 2018, but I lapsed hard since, until Oculus released the Quest 2 in October. It's the first VR headset I like wearing, and I used SideQuest to add bootleg custom tracks that support my embarrassingly narrow musical taste, turning my Quest into a nearly single-purpose beat sabering machine. (I probably owe Muse and the New Pornographers royalties or something? Look, I just really like the unofficial Expert beatmap of "The Mary Martin Show.") Pro: I remember I have a body again. Con: I get OK Go stuck in my head every morning. — *Adi Robertson*

Nike Training Club and Reddit

I've been a Nike Training Club user for a while now, but this year I needed it more than ever as my cycle commute disappeared and my step-count plummeted. Nike's app offers a collection of workouts you can filter based on how much equipment you have available, how much time you have, whether you're after a strength or a cardio workout, and so on. This

year, my filters were “none,” “all the time in the world,” and “I’ll take what I can get,” respectively.

What I like most is how simple most of the workouts are, which leaves me free to alleviate the boredom of exercise by listening to podcasts while I work out. Instead of having to listen to a personal trainer’s motivational tidbits alongside their instructions, Nike’s app mainly shows simple looping videos of each exercise and leaves my mind free to wander. (The app also includes more traditional workout videos, but they’ve never clicked with me.)

Early in the year, I also got a lot out of working out as a group with my flatmates. Here, the routine devised by Reddit’s Bodyweight Fitness community was invaluable. It includes strength exercises you can do with minimal equipment, and different variants of each to let you adjust their difficulty. While you don’t need much to get started, we found adding a pullup bar, gymnastics rings, and resistance bands was a relatively affordable way to give us a lot more exercise options. — *Jon Porter*

Instagram

While I typically keep my social media habit limited to Twitter, one of my early strategies for staying active while staying home was collecting posts of at-home exercises with Instagram’s Saved Posts feature. Fitness instructors have always shared some content on Instagram, but the closing of gyms and fitness studios brought a wealth of free guided workouts to the app. It’s no Pinterest, but my collection in Saved Posts lets me keep easy exercises on hand, and eliminates one of my many excuses for not moving: I rarely know what I’m doing when it comes to working out.

As the year has dragged on, I’ve fallen off my Instagram health kick, but I still collect and sort exercise posts. Obviously there are fewer physical benefits, but I still find

it very soothing. — *Ian Campbell*

The Garmin Fenix 6X



The Fenix 6 series of multi-sport GPS watches.
Image: Garmin

I know I'm tempting fate by saying this, but my fitness improved dramatically during the pandemic. I was motivated by boredom and, frankly, a fear of dying, but also by a do-it-all Garmin Fenix 6X Pro Solar watch. It also helped that my local government promoted safe, socially distanced outdoor fitness activities instead of issuing a strict stay-at-home order.

I was motivated to run faster and longer using Garmin's PacePro feature

Before fitness gadgets starting selling out at Amazon and beyond, I managed to amass a set of adjustable resistance bands I had read about on *Wirecutter* and a luxurious pair of weighted jump ropes from Crossrope. In March and April, I worked out with these items pretty much every day while sequestered at home. The Garmin watch did a fair job of automatically tracking my pushups and bicep curls, but it was far less capable of detecting other movements, failing miserably at tracking my Crossrope sessions, for example.

Crossrope makes an app with paid membership tiers, but I found it superfluous to my needs. While I’m not quite at the level of a pro boxer, I’ve managed to perfect several jumping skills like crossovers, doubles, and a variety of skips to keep the repetition interesting.

I also took up yoga at this time to help maintain my sanity and increase flexibility. While the Fenix 6 can guide you through animated yoga sessions, as an absolute beginner I found it impractical and disruptive to keep peeking at my wrist to study pose mechanics. YouTube is a much better living room coach. I completed Kassandra’s 30-day challenge (Adriene is too chatty for me) and yoga is now part of my regular routine.

22:04

VO_2 Max

Help

Current | 4w | 12w | **6m**

10 Apr - 8 Oct



Your VO_2 Max is in the top 10% for your age and gender.

Your Fitness Age is 20.

As spring sprung, I took to running outside through the glorious tourist-free Amsterdam city streets and parks. Here the Garmin watch excelled. I was motivated to run faster and longer using Garmin's PacePro feature to inject my Spotify playlist, real-time coaching, and turn-by-turn navigation into my AirPods Pro earbuds. I soon became addicted to setting new personal records and lowering my fitness age in competition with my running friends who prefer Garmin watches over anything else.

By summer, I was using the Garmin Fenix 6 to track my kitesurfing sessions, all-day bike rides, and open-water swims in the ocean. By fall, I took up golfing, motivated by Garmin's super impressive ability to track each shot played on hundreds of golf courses around the world. The Fenix 6 isn't accurate enough to track putts, but it does an amazing job of tracking each shot from the tee to the green allowing you to measure club performance, keep score, and see trends after each round.

The Fenix 6 has proven to be a jack of all trades and master of some, motivating me to try new activities like mountain biking to see how it adapts. After nine months of intense and uninterrupted usage, the watch now says that my fitness age is 20. As a 53-year-old gadget-obsessed human trying to outlive a virus, that's something I'm proud of. — *Thomas Ricker*

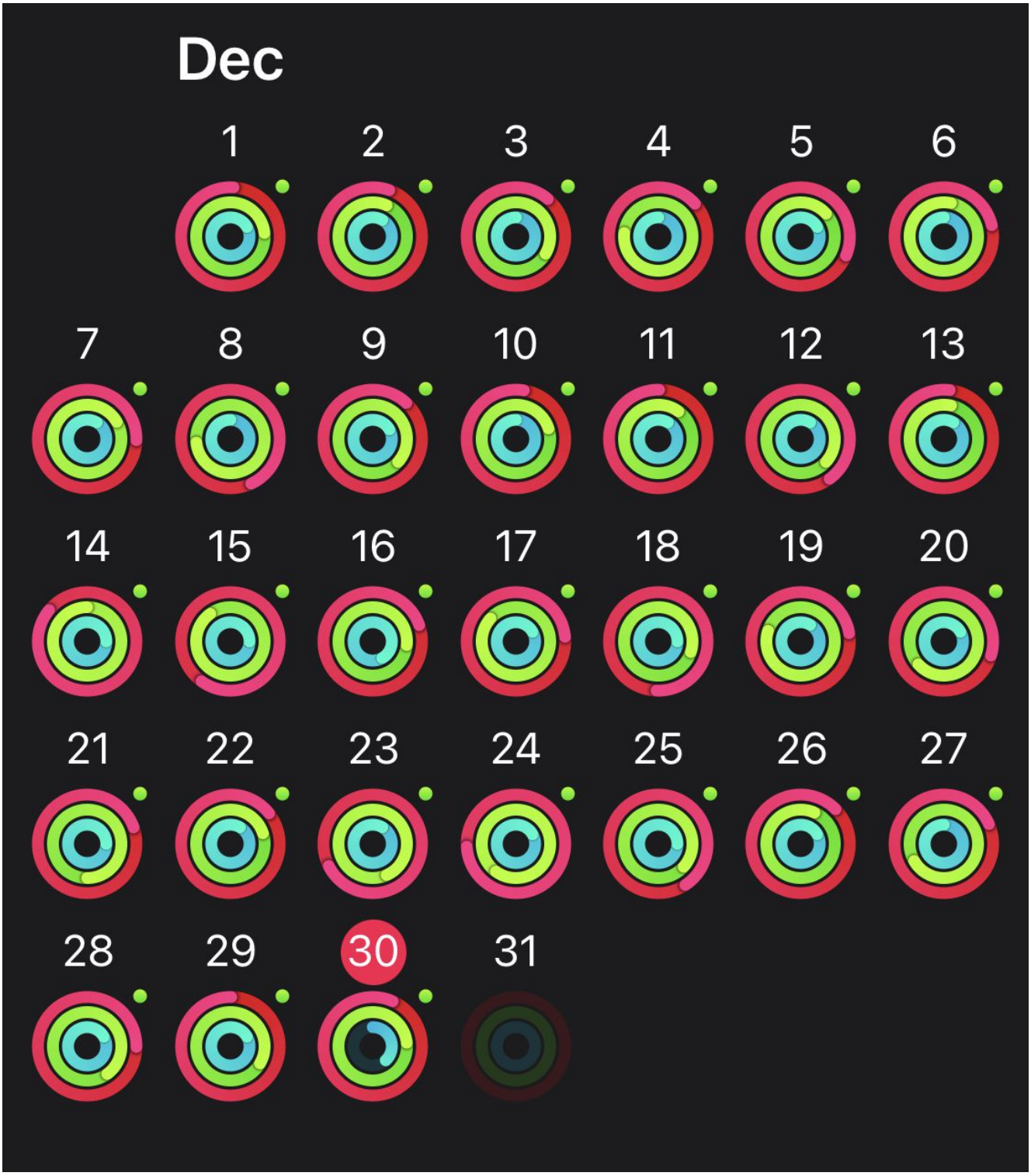
The Apple Watch, Nintendo Games, and Fitbod



The Apple Watch Series 6.
Photo by Vjeran Pavic / The Verge

When I got an Apple Watch in November 2019, there were two things I didn’t expect: the upcoming pandemic that would make going to the gym impossible, and just how well the gamified rings system would work on me. The desire to fill every ring every day (which I have done, thank you) has made it so, at the very least, I get up and speed-walk around my apartment every day.

I also managed to find a copy of Wii Sports Resort at a local game store, so I didn’t have to pay the eBay scalper prices that started popping up around March (hardcore gamers weren’t the only ones dealing with those). It’s not really what I would call a workout, but it’s fun and it gets my wife and I off the couch. Would I rather be playing *Beat Saber*? Yes, but I couldn’t get my hands on the VR rig I wanted this year. That’s on the list for 2021, once we can find PC hardware again.



Proof. There's more where that came from.
Screenshot by Mitchell Clark / The Verge

For a Nintendo game that *actually* provides a workout I turned to *Ring Fit Adventure*. I cranked it up to the highest difficulty, and immediately regretted it… but pushing through has been rewarding, and I feel like I've actually gotten a workout in. It's not the heart-pounding, sweating everywhere workout I've gotten from YouTube workout videos or Apple Fitness Plus, but I'm usually sore the next day.

Finally, while I wouldn’t call adjustable dumbbells “tech,” I paired mine with the app Fitbod, which tracks your exercises and builds sets based on which muscle groups are fresh. Combined with the fact I now have a full set of weights that can actually fit in a small apartment, I do more strength training now than I ever did at the gym. — *Mitchell Clark*

What exercise?



Lifting this monitor onto my desk was perhaps my most strenuous task in 2020.

I went into the pandemic with the best of intentions and an array of gadgetry at my disposal: a VR headset with exercise games, a motorized standing desk, a genuinely good road bicycle, a smartwatch, even an array of relatively new power tools (leaf blower, hedge trimmer, pressure washer) then I bought intending to clean up the yard.

Instead, I proceeded to become an utter couch potato for the duration of the year.

I might have used the standing desk's standing feature… twice? I had a few intense VR sessions of *Pistol Whip*, sure, but the staying power wasn't there, and I'm not sure playing through *Half-Life: Alyx* ever saw me break a sweat. Heck, I used an automatic tire inflator the one-and-only time I hit the park with my bike to test an awesome new phone mount. I did rake all the leaves in the backyard twice, I suppose. But if I'm telling the truth, I probably burned more calories breaking down a mountain of Amazon cardboard boxes than any other activity this year.

There was one good reason I didn't feel all that motivated, though: after years of failed diets, I finally lost some weight during shelter-in-place. Using a Wi-Fi-equipped smart scale and the MyFitnessPal app, I mentally berated myself to weigh in and log calories almost every single day for several months at a stretch, limiting myself to 1,600 a day. I lost 25 pounds, and I don't get as hungry anymore! Imagine if I'd exercised, too. — *Sean Hollister*

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