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Stamina in *Dark Souls III*

Dark Souls III, a game that revolves around attacking and dodging a wide range of enemies and bosses, utilizes a stamina mechanic to limit the player's ability to perform most actions. While many action oriented games feature a stamina mechanic of their own, the importance of this mechanic and its effects on the player are extremely prevalent in *Dark Souls III*. Stamina affects the player's ability to run, roll, jump, attack, defend, and cast spells of any sort. There are a few things that affect maximum stamina and the rate at which stamina regenerates, in turn affecting the actions that the player can perform. Stamina can make or break a game depending on its grasp over the player, in *Dark Souls III* the grip is tight but allows for enough wriggle room to make it a worthwhile experience.

Actions that a player can perform will affect and be affected by stamina in different ways. Attacking with a weapon will drain stamina based on the weight, weapon type, and stat requirements of the weapon. Massive swords will likely only be a 2-3 swing combo before a player is completely out of stamina, where daggers can be swung upwards of 10 times before running out of stamina. This creates a sense of reality within the player, it shows just how much effort their character must put in to wield the weapon effectively and how they wish their character to wield it. Rolling and back stepping, the games main form of avoiding damage, require stamina to use and take up

less stamina when a character is carrying less equipment. While these actions cost a bit less than wielding a massive weapon, spamming too many rolls will leave the player out of stamina. The limitations that stamina puts on these actions force the player to carefully plan their next moves, as getting caught with no stamina will mean death or near death around most enemies. Spellcasters tend to focus more on their mana since it powers their spells, however, gathering the energy to cast said spells/performing the actions also cost stamina and can leave a mage wide open after a volley of spells. Since spell casting would probably take a deal of effort to pull off in the real world, it would make sense that it takes a bit of stamina from *Dark Souls III* characters as well. A player is able to sprint in order to get around the map faster, and with a relatively large area to explore(See figure 1), that speed can really make a difference in traversal time. That boost to mobility is also without repercussions as sprinting drains stamina over time, as opposed to a single chunk of stamina like most other actions require. This allows the player to make short bursts towards wherever they want to be without leaving themselves defenceless, giving them a bit more freedom to move about the battlefield without letting them sprint by every enemy. This creates a limited, yet open, set of options for the player to choose from at any moment, pushing that sense of urgency and fear that the game is going to get the better of them at some point or another(or over and over in many cases).

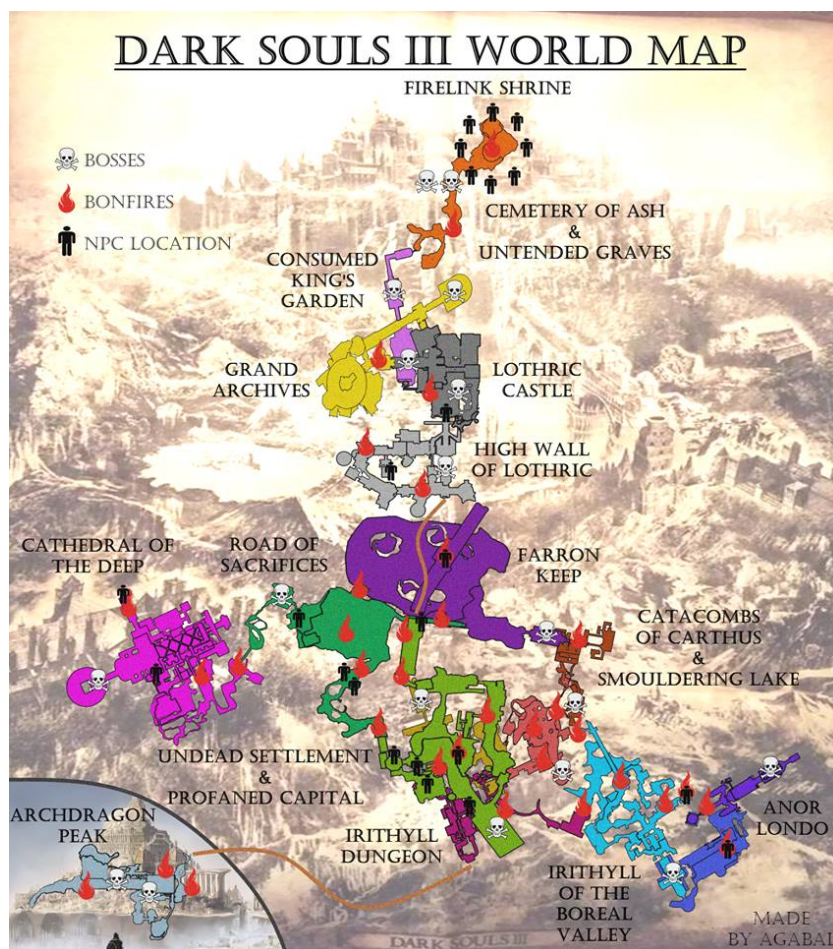


Figure 1(<https://darksouls3.wiki.fextralife.com/file/Dark-Souls-3/darksouls3%20map.png>)

The endurance stat of the player increases the maximum stamina amount by a few points per level until endurance 40 where it reaches a soft cap(meaning that stamina per level is lowered significantly after endurance 40). See figure 2 for differences in the stamina bar with endurance level. *Dark Souls* allows for players to infinitely play the game, increasing in difficulty with each completion of the story(Until a character's 7th game where enemies cap at around twice their original strength). A player, however, can only realistically focus on a few stats to level as levels become

increasingly difficult to come by as they cost more and more souls per level. This makes endurance a top contender for stats to put levels into, regardless of class or play style.

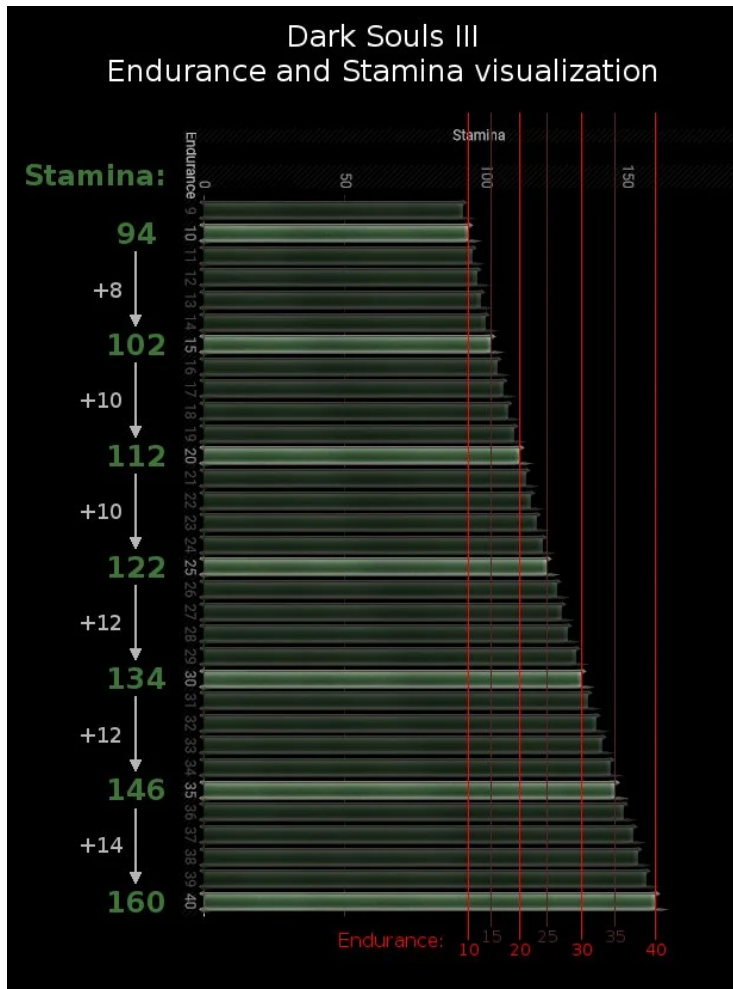


Figure 2

(<https://external-preview.redd.it/Fpz89Rku4KqLeYx5T6yCullWZryS5ZIRrAbc8-7j6lo.jpg?auto=webp&s=fb9ae6cc303edcfda9143e63f615a126e522e029>)

While endurance seems like an almost necessary stat for players to level, there are ways a player can increase stamina and stamina regeneration outside of the character's statistics. Equipment and consumables allow the player some freedom when designing their character, playstyle, and itemization. Many items and consumables

increase stamina regeneration(only two items increase maximum stamina) which pairs well with the endurance stat that only increases maximum stamina, giving more room to the player to add their own touch to their experience. As stated by Josh Coulson on customizing a player's character, "There's a reason developers make the process so complex. They know it means a lot to many players, and they also want those players to be as immersed in their virtual worlds as possible"(Coulson and Josh Coulson (2862 Articles Published)). The ability to build a character to function in the way the player wants is something that almost every gamer appreciates. Overall the importance of stamina as a resource is dealt with nicely by the developers to keep it on the players mind constantly while also not making it the only thing worth paying attention to. A large stamina bar with fast regeneration is helpful for most, but is by no means the only viable way to play.

Each player character has an equip load that can be increased in a variety of ways. If a player equips 70% or more of their maximum equip load, they will suffer a few repercussions. While speed is also affected, stamina recovery suffers a good deal when overencumbered. This prevents the player from being able to pull off highly dexterous moves in rapid succession while carrying an immense amount of weight. This forces the player to be extremely cautious about their equipment load as the debuffs to stamina regeneration and speed make them highly vulnerable. The impact that weight has on stamina in this game gives the player more incentive to truly think about what they want their character to be able to do and how they want to build them. This appeals to the expert gamer demographic that like to have some freedom to build their characters with strategy behind them.

Even with all of the ways to increase stamina and stamina regeneration, some players have issues with the limitations to their play. One steam user by the IGN kobayashi took to the forums to complain about how slow stamina regenerates for the aggression level of bosses. They felt as if boss fights were on a constant attack once or twice, then evade for a few seconds, and then sit there to regenerate stamina, repeat. Other users quickly offered tips to improve that aspect of the game for them, things that made stamina easily managed and utilized in a less rinse and repeat cycle. It seemed like most players found the stamina stat and the ways to alter it to be mostly balanced and well done, with the expectation of those who just can't quite find the most enjoyable way for them to play. Regardless of the negativity towards the game, people like kobayashi still play and enjoy(for the most part) it. The limitations that stamina puts on the players are a huge part of what draws them in to play and keep playing even after bitter death after bitter death. The need to tackle this challenge, especially when a person finds it to be utterly impossible, is referred to as "The Sword-in-the-Stone effect" by John Pavlus on the *Scientific American*. He states, "This effect of invoking players' needs for competence and relatedness also drives the appeal of niche console games like the *Dark Souls* series, whose sophisticated play controls appeal only to expert gamers."(Pavlus, 2016). For the most part, players that flock to *Dark Souls* III and its predecessors are ones that wish to conquer the challenge of the game. Stamina in the game is not very forgiving and limits how often a player can perform an action and how many times that action can be performed in succession, which appeals perfectly to the niche of experienced gamers that come to *Dark Souls* to see what they can accomplish under less than favorable circumstances.

The way that stamina currently works feels good to me as a player, I wouldn't have too much to say to developers about the actual mechanic. My only request would be for a couple more items that increase stamina max and regeneration just to have the options when creating my character build. I would like to see an armor set of some kind that boosts stamina recovery, but it would have to be light armor in order to make it balanced in the overall game sense. An item that trades other resources for stamina over time could be a good trade off item for people who like to make the game as difficult as possible. Regardless of whether or not more items get added, the stamina feature is in a good state of balance between difficulty and manageability.

The experience that stamina creates in *Dark Souls III* has its positives and negatives, but overall it provides a challenging yet rewarding aspect to the game. It does its job as the driving and secondary forces for a character's actions, creating just a long enough window for the player to make a meaningful set of moves before having to stop for a moment to regain that ability. The interaction that players can have with their stamina maximum and recovery is enough to make a sizable difference in their time on the move and their time standing still. With the only tweak I would make on this mechanic being an addition of items, I would say that it is largely successful as an asset to the game. It provides a positive experience for most players, giving the seasoned veterans a decent constraint while also giving more casual players enough room for error.

Work Cited

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