

Are fitness trackers worth the hype?



Fitness bands, also called wearable health trackers, have become a popular trend in the last few years. Millions of these devices have been sold, but can they help you get healthy?

What they do

Most fitness trackers have features that act like a pedometer, counting your steps and other physical activity. Their features vary widely, however. Some trackers simply tell you how many steps you take in a day. Others are designed to be worn during exercise, such as running, and may track your distance and show your route. Other trackers are waterproof and designed to be worn when swimming.

Many trackers also record quality and length of sleep. Because they have a movement sensor, they can determine how many times you woke and when you were in deep sleep.

Most of them are designed to be used with an app on your smartphone, where you can see how you're doing and make improvements where needed.

Improving health with a tracker

It can be helpful to know how many steps you take and how well you've slept. But keep in mind that these devices aren't perfect. For instance, if you walk while pushing a stroller, a tracker worn on your wrist may not count your steps because your arms aren't swinging.

Sleep tracking can also be helpful, but won't be a magic fix. Some trackers assume you're in a deep sleep because you don't move around. But, some people just naturally move less during the night, even if their sleep quality isn't great. This may lead to incorrect information that makes you think you're sleeping better than you actually are.

Your body may be the best gauge when it comes to your health. When you don't sleep well, you'll feel sluggish. And you can easily keep track of any exercise you do with a fitness diary or a simple notebook. As for step counting, these devices are helpful, but an old-fashioned pedometer can work just as well.

ALTERNATIVES TO FITNESS TRACKERS

If you don't have — or want — one of these devices, there are still ways you can get healthy with technology. Many apps that work with a smartphone can help you track movements and sleep, and others help you manually record things like mood, stress levels, and menstrual cycles. These require you to carry your smartphone with you, but don't use any wearable devices.

