

Fitness Trackers: Should I Get One?

Is it a trend or an investment in good health?



Remember those gym memberships that are bought in January in an awe-inspiring burst of motivation — and mostly neglected by July? For some of us, wearable fitness trackers have joined them.

Worldwide, 25 million fitness trackers will be sold this year. However, one-third of American consumers stopped using it within six months, according to the [National Institutes of Health](#).

“The key is that two-thirds of people are still using them,” Tony Musto, PhD, fitness expert at the University of Miami Health System. “It’s a fact that people who exercise regularly enjoy better health benefits than those who don’t. If a fitness tracker helps you keep moving and making better health decisions, do it.”

There are many good reasons to keep your tracker on your wrist:

- **Motivation:** Tracking devices can help us stay motivated to reach our fitness goals. “Research has shown that fitness tracking devices encourage a significant increase in fitness and physical activities because they make it more fun for their wearers,” says Musto. “If the device has reminders to exercise, it is more difficult to ignore when we’re feeling lazy.”
- **Safety:** Beyond counting steps and keeping track of calories, these devices serve as medical warning devices for people with heart conditions and other serious medical issues. Many newer models monitor sleep, heart rate and blood pressure. These wearables can prevent dangerous

heart rates and alert us to serious health risks.

- **Dealing with Fitness Plateaus:** The tracking capabilities of a fitness device record and gauge physical activity, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, and help your doctor develop a plan to increase fitness and set new goals.
- **Comradery with Co-Workers and Exercise Partners:** Getting healthy is far easier when working toward similar goals with friends. Through smartphone apps, wearers can connect to share progress and goals.

One thing to remember, says Musto, is that the accuracy of wearable devices is a work in progress. “There are so many variables involved in accurately measuring health statistics, especially calories. Many devices are getting close but they are not perfect.”

Whether opting for a simple pedometer to help increase activity or going with an interactive fitness device that can be download to a computer, it helps to have goals in mind. Individual devices can range between \$79 and \$300. A pedometer is associated with significant increases in physical activity and decreases in body mass index (BMI) and blood pressure, according to a systematic review of published studies in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Talking to our primary care doctor is a good start. Asking him or her whether we might benefit from a wearable fitness device can be helpful for you. One thing we can’t avoid: fitness devices may motivate us, but ultimately, the true benefit comes from actually DOING the exercise.