

Fitness Gadgets Make Workouts Fun

Exercise Your Right to Use Technology

By: Kim Keough

As a teen, you're probably surrounded by technology: cell phones, computers, MP3 players, and more. It's gadgetry that makes it easier to communicate, and makes life easier and more efficient. So why not use fitness gadgets to ramp up your exercise routine and aid your athletic performance? Sure, you know about Nintendo's Wii Fit, but there's a lot more out there than games.

Fitness gadgets have been used for the last several decades to track nutrition, exercise, and weight loss progress. Some examples are pedometers, calorie counters, and fancy BMI scales. Now fitness gadget creators are finding ways to make their products electronic, digital, and in some cases, totally wireless. Here's just a sampling of what's out there for you to try.

Pedometer

The most popular electronic fitness gadget has to be the pedometer. A pedometer tracks the distance you've walked or run via a small device that usually features a clip on attachment. A pedometer can track distance in either steps or mileage, many have multiple settings for all kinds of uses. The technology involved in tracking movement is basic enough that most pedometers can be attached to your waistband or sneaker without any noticeable difference. They are being bundled with other products, like smartphones. As these gadgets become more popular many companies are designing them to be more colorful and streamlined, and some are even building in MP3 players or FM tuners. Accuracy can be a problem, but if you're out there using one, no matter what brand, that's a step in the right direction.

Wearable Monitors

The body monitoring armband is another fitness gadget promoting weight loss. Sensors on the armband electronically track activity, calories consumed and burned, and physical changes indicating weight loss progress. Most armbands are entirely wireless and can be worn all day. They come with a USB plug-in that will download all of the information collected onto your computer. This is particularly attractive for people who can't seem to keep a food journal or would like to track work out specifics.



No Weigh! Body monitoring armbands are so accurate and reliable that contestants on TV's *The Biggest Loser* wear them to track their progress while on the show.

GPS

The bicycle GPS computer can track heart rate and measures speed, distance, time, calories burned, altitude, climb and descent. Most devices are wireless and feature user friendly, all terrain-color displays. Since GPS and satellite devices are usually transferrable between users, these gadgets are ideal for sharing bike courses and rides with your friends.

Body Fat Analyzer

Measuring body fat composition is one way of ensuring long-term exercise success. Handheld body fat analyzers allow you to input data (such as height and weight); users then hold the grip electrodes, which allow a harmless electrical current to run through your body, measuring resistance to determine body density. But don't obsess over your body fat since your body is growing. This is really more for kids who need to watch their weight under the supervision of a doctor or nutritionist.

BMI Scales

Your BMI (Body Mass Index) can provide a reliable indicator of body fatness and is used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems. BMI scales look like regular weight scales, but calculate your BMI value. Many provide a status graph and allow you to track and store data. A BMI score is a general indicator for weight and doesn't account for things like body shape or muscle mass.

Heart Rate Monitors

If you're a runner or biker, you might be looking for a way to push your performance to the next level. Heart rate monitors typically use a strap and sensor around the chest and a watch-like device on the wrist to provide instant feedback about the intensity of a workout. Some distance and pace monitors also have a GPS receiver and can track speed, distance, and exertion level, as well as provide data about pacing, calories burned, and pacing.

These gadgets are just the starting point for a range of tech savvy alternatives to health and fitness. There are plenty of online forums with in depth user reviews of fitness gadgets, so it may be best to research the one you're looking for to find the best match making a purchase. (Consumer Reports is a good place to start.)

This article has been reviewed by BodiMojo health expert Tara Cousineau.