

The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

When it comes to getting fitter and healthier, knowledge is power. The latest science in fitness tracking devices has fueled this tech boom in get off your butt gadgets. It wasn't too long ago that using technology as part of your fitness routine meant an odometre and maybe a spreadsheet. Though both are still useful, fitness trackers have come a long way. These new breeds of wrist worn gadgets can tell you more about yourself than even you ever knew. They can keep track of steps taken, exercise performed, calories burned, miles moved, food eaten, water consumed, pounds lost, and even hours slept. Data from your tracker is uploaded directly to your smart phone or computer so that you can track your daily progress.

There's never been a better selection of fitness trackers, but with choice comes confusion. The right activity tracker will be based on your individual needs: whether its step counting, sleep tracking, or 24/7 heart rate monitoring, there's a dizzying array of features to choose from. It's about finding the device that's right for you. No matter how impressively a tracker detects sleep quality or measures steps, you'll be miserable if you buy something you don't like to wear. Activity trackers are usually bracelets, watches or clip-ons. Clip on devices can also be worn on the wrist, but not vice versa. Pay close attention to features that best suit your needs, and consider spending a little more on a device that is stylish and low profile.

The best fitness trackers cost between \$100 - \$250, of course you can spend more or less depending on your budget. However if you pay less than \$50 you will probably get a subpar product with poor accuracy.



If you run or bike, I recommend tracking your activity with an app before splurging on a tracker. With some trackers you still need to carry your phone to get accurate pacing, mapping and distance, so you will want to be sure before you make a purchase that you are okay with carrying your phone. Maybe you would prefer a tracker with a built in GPS? These are trackers usually more expensive and include built in optical heart rate monitors tailored toward athletes and exercise enthusiasts. Some trackers also allow you to tag specific activities to get the most accurate calorie burn, so telling your tracker when you are about to start a spin class or when you're at a zumba class will help you get credit for your moves.

If you lift weights and strength train older wearable's that tracked your movement proved useless on the static machines in the gym. The latest heart-rate sensing tech allows you to get an accurate picture of your calorific burn, whether you're hitting weights or

indoor cycling. The result is the ability to detect short bursts, like weight sets, for the first time. These more advanced trackers can be placed on muscles after a workout to detect body fat and muscle quality. They work by sending a small current to the muscle and the surrounding fat. As the current flows depending on the muscle's fitness, the app is able to determine the quality of 24 different muscle groups. Users can track improvements over time and identify areas that require more focus.

If you are someone who is not likely to include exercise into your daily routine... In other words, If you are utterly sedentary? An activity tracker is a useful gadget that might very well motivate some slight adjustments to your lifestyle that can positively affect your overall health. Studies have shown that people who keep logs are the most successful at reaching their health, fitness and weight loss goals. These wrist worn "personal trainers" promote easy to make changes and set manageable goals. These might include going for a walk on your coffee break, or making the effort to get to a lunchtime yoga class or hitting the sheets an hour earlier. As you achieve these goals, you can level up and add in more healthy habits.

Designed to gamify your daily routine, activity trackers make people do funny/crazy things, like taking the long route to the bathroom or running on the spot while talking on the phone just to get in another 20 steps. If your device doesn't inspire you to move, its social "sweatwork" just might. Fitness trackers promote exercise to become more social adding an element of competition. I know several people who've used activity trackers and greatly enjoyed a rivalry in outdoing each other's steps taken, calories burned and even hours slept. This social element is the key to helping support and encourage others on their path to healthier living.

Most fitness trackers offer some support for those seeking to lose weight. Adding another level of accountability. They leverage the core idea behind weight loss -- that the calories you burn must be greater than the calories you eat -- by providing an estimate of calories burned (based on height, weight, gender, and measured activity) and some way to track calories eaten. Some activity trackers have their own food-logging platforms built right into the companion app. The mere act of tracking your activity can be enough to motivate or shame you to exercise more and make better food choices.

Personal fitness trackers eliminate guess work out of your workouts. They ensure that you are able to focus on enjoying better health. Be sure to shop for the best combination of features and comfort. Look for easy to use software with clear language and an easy to read screen. Pay attention to how the numbers make you feel. On a day when you walk 1,000 more steps than usual, you may notice you feel great. You'll want that good feeling again the next day. That's how fitness trackers reinforce good behavior and drive you forward to better health.

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