



(Right) Photo courtesy of Basis Science, Inc.

Power Your Health

Stay on track with one of these techy fitness gadgets.

BY Lisa Maloney

Pedometers were the original fitness trackers, hanging at your hip and using the sway of your body to count how many steps you took. But they've grown and changed at the speed of modern tech, evolving into sleek arm- and wrist-band devices that log and chart all your exercise metrics.

Are fitness trackers really worth your money? I spoke with Ted Vickey, senior consultant on emerging technologies for the American Council on Exercise, who told me that having a device that'll encourage you to go out and walk around (or exercise in general) is a win-win for everybody. "I see these fitness trackers as an entrée into fitness and health for people who aren't doing it now," he explained.

Even if you already have an established exercise habit, fitness trackers offer some pretty alluring benefits. Depending on the model you choose, a fitness tracker can offer easy-to-read charts of your progress, suggest tweaks to your training program, track your sleep habits (which affect both performance and weight loss) and serve as a diet log.

And if you've never really been into the whole exercise scene? More and more fitness trackers turn exercising into a game, using your workouts to unlock achievements and virtual trophies. Others let you share your achievements over social media and challenge friends to a little friendly competition. Instead of struggling to make exercise fun, the social aspect turns exercise into a way to create fun.

Are there any downsides?

There is no such thing as a magic pill for exercise – and so far, even the best fitness trackers won't actually get down and do pushups or run sprints for you. Still, the power of immediate feedback, analysis and encouragement is hard to deny. "Studies suggest that even people you barely know... if they say 'Great job!' on your run, you feel great about it," Vickey explained.

But there are a few downsides to consider. Vickey warns that when you use a fitness tracker, you're putting a lot of information out there – so make sure you read through the company's privacy policy carefully and are okay with where all that information will be going.

You should also keep in mind that fitness trackers will give you relative numbers, not absolute numbers. In other words, if you use several fitness trackers to monitor the exact same workout, they would probably return slightly different numbers – but if you use one tracker consistently, you'll be able to accurately gauge your progress relative to past workouts.

Each device measures slightly different metrics and uses unique features to help you keep real-time tabs on everything from your sleep cycles to cardio achievements to daily nutrient levels. Depending on your goals and motivation, here are a few noteworthy models to check out:

THE BASIC WRISTBAND

The Fitbit Flex wristband uses a three-axis accelerometer to track your steps taken, activity time, calories burned and distance traveled. It also tracks sleep time and quality,

and syncs wirelessly to a computer or some smartphones. LED lights illuminate like a scoreboard to show your progress toward a steps-, calories- or distance-based goal (\$99.95; fitbit.com).

THE SOCIAL COMPETITOR

The Nike FuelBand SE wristband uses a three-axis accelerometer to help estimate calorie burn, exercise duration and workout intensity. It displays your data via a LED display and color-coded progress display on the wristband, or via your Bluetooth-enabled Android or iOS smartphone. You can also share and compare your progress on social media, win virtual trophies and challenge buddies to a little friendly competition (\$99; nike.com).

THE WEIGHT LOSS HELPER

The BodyMedia Link armband uses a three-axis accelerometer, skin temperature, heat flux and galvanic skin response to gauge your calories burned, exercise intensity, steps taken and sleep cycle. It lets you set a variety of personal goals and syncs with your desktop or iOS/Android mobile device through Bluetooth or USB (\$119; bodymedia.com).

THE HABIT BUILDER

The Basis fitness watch uses heart rate patterns, body temperature, sweat rates and optical blood flow sensors to analyze everything from your exercise habits to sleep patterns. It also suggests tweaks to your daily routines to help you meet your goals (\$199, mybasis.com).

THE FUN APP

Fitocracy turns fitness into a game, awarding points and unlocking new levels as you progress. It's easy to tap into community encouragement here, thanks to a Facebook-like feed of friends' updates, and you can even challenge other users to "duels." Available on iOS and Android interfaces (Free; fitocracy.com). [FIT](#)