Put Tech to Work For Your Health

Eat Right, Manage Weight

Today's foodie apps take the guesswork out of cooking for your family or eating out on the town. You can check calorie counts, plan a week's worth of meals, or find healthy restaurants in your area. To monitor your progress, add a high-tech bathroom scale. It can evaluate body fat, check your heart rate, and even link up with your phone.

Get Moving

Wearable fitness trackers monitor everything from calories burned to heart rate to signs you've been still too long. Sync yours with a phone or tablet to keep up with the info -- and to set and meet health goals. Need some friendly competition? Look for a fitness app that lets you join a group and compete against other users.

Catch Better ZZZs

A restful night's sleep is a click away. Many apps offer to wake you up during your lightest sleep phase -- the best time to rise. If your phone sits on your nightstand at bedtime, use it to cue up an app that will lull you to dreamland with low-frequency sounds. A white noise machine can cover up household sounds that keep you awake.

Quit Bad Habits

Need help to ditch a bad habit? Stop smoking with an app that helps you set realistic goals and stick to them. When you crave a smoke, use your fingers to tap the app instead. Or sign up for daily text messages and set them to start on your quit date. Believe it or not, there's even a breathalyzer app that syncs with your phone to help you know when you've had too much to drink.

Track Your Numbers

Checking your blood pressure at home? You can use a regular monitor and type your numbers into a tracker on your mobile device. Or try a smart monitor that links to your phone or fits on your arm like a wristwatch. People with diabetes can choose from blood sugar tracking apps and web sites -- just plug your numbers in after you test. If you have allergies or asthma, you can check the pollen count or air quality before you leave the house.

Get Organized

Stress no more: Help is out there to organize your day. Choose an app that breaks down every task into manageable chunks, sends you a daily to-do list, or monitors how much time you spend on social media. Others use a process known as mind-mapping, which turns your ideas into a workable, visual plan. Try one out and see if you can finally write that novel.

See the Doctor

Doctors' offices are going high-tech. Many have offered online appointment setting and prescription refills for years, but now some doctors will email you, too. Concerned about a mole? Re-create the look of it with an app, monitor changes, and find out when to get it checked.

Chart Your Health History

Want another reason to create a family tree? Your family's past can hold the key to your health future. Most apps that trace your background offer access to huge databases of historical info, from photos to death certificates to census reports to newspaper clippings. Or you can go to the U.S. Surgeon General's web site, which offers a program to help you trace your family's roots -- and health.

Get Ready for Baby

Trying to get pregnant? There's an app to track your ovulation cycles. Already expecting? You can track your bundle of joy's movements, see what size the baby is at any time, watch birth videos to get ready, record your baby's heartbeat, and even get a checklist for what to pack on delivery day. Hang onto this info when your baby is older -- she'll enjoy seeing it.

Power Up Your Parenting

Raising your kids is a lot easier thanks to a wealth of digital tools. You can find trustworthy information about common childhood ailments on computers or devices, or check your child's vision via tablet. Some apps turn your phone into a baby monitor -- a great solution for travel. If potty training is a struggle for older tots, you can use an app to track and reward their efforts with kid-friendly graphics.

Prepare for an Emergency

Apps are available to record your medical and contact information in the event of an emergency -- having this info on hand could save crucial time when you get to the ER. You can also find out how to give first aid or CPR, or learn ways to prepare for -- or respond to -- a manmade or weather disaster.

Hit the Road

Vacations are good for your health. You can plan yours with apps that let you book travel in the U.S. and abroad, manage your spending, and even send texts free of charge, all over the world. Others offer thousands of interactive maps to get you where you're going. Want to pack light? Use an app to turn your smartphone camera into a pro photographer's dream.

Take Back Your Life

Who is the rudest person in a restaurant or at the dinner table? The one on the cell phone. With the whole world at our fingertips, it's easy to lose track of real life. Try to disconnect for a while -- even an hour -- and see how you feel. You may be less stressed and sleep better if you cut back screen time, especially before bed.

Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD on September 29, 2014

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