

# Electronic devices with reminders make sticking to diets easier

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There's some good news for those trying to lose weight with the help of new apps on their mobile devices. They may actually work, says a new research study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

“Our study provides evidence that ongoing contact through hand-held devices can be beneficial to individuals who are trying to lose weight,” said study author Mindi Styn, Ph.D., a research assistant professor of nursing and epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh.

Past research has shown that self-monitoring one's daily calorie intake and exercise may be the best way to make the necessary behavior changes to follow a [weight loss](#) regimen. The old method of writing it down in a paper diary can be tedious, however, so the new study looked

at whether the technological advances of electronic devices have made it easier to stick with self-monitoring.

The researchers recruited 210 overweight or obese adults with body mass indexes between 27 and 43 who were randomly assigned to three different groups: self-monitoring with an electronic diary, self-monitoring with a device that provided feedback via a daily message, or self-monitoring with a paper diary. All participants had group counseling sessions on weight loss and set daily calorie intake and physical activity goals.

After 24 months, people who stuck to their diaries, be they electronic or paper, more than 60 percent of the time, lost more weight than those who self-monitored less than 30 percent of the time. But those using the device with feedback were more likely to stick to the daily self-monitoring and had the greatest weight loss, with an average of 2.3 percent.

Lawrence Cheskin, M.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center at Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore said he encourages patients trying to [lose weight](#) to take advantage of tools that facilitate self-monitoring since it's been shown to increase the likelihood of success.

“Applications that remind people of what they are trying to do and how to do it are potentially very helpful,” he added.

Though the researchers had anticipated a greater weight loss overall and greater differences between groups, they found the average weight loss among the three groups was about the same. Styn suggested that the self-monitoring software on the device they used was not as user-friendly as current apps on the market, which may have discouraged some participants.

**More information:** Burke LE, Styn MA, et al. Using mHealth technology to enhance self-monitoring for weight loss. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, June 2012.

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