

# Technophobia may keep seniors from using apps to manage diabetes

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Despite showing interest in web or mobile apps to help manage their Type 2 diabetes, only a small number of older adults actually use them, says a new study from the University of Waterloo. Approximately 2.2 million Canadians are living with Type 2 diabetes, 2 million of whom are age 50 or older.

The study, which appears in the online edition of the *Journal of Diabetes Science and Technology*, found that although more than 90 per cent of research participants owned a computer or had daily Internet access, just 18 per cent used applications on this [technology](#) to help manage their [diabetes](#). While almost half owned smartphones, only 5 per cent used them to manage their disease.

"There was a strong association between age and confidence—confidence about technology use really dropped off in the oldest age groups," said Professor Peter Hall, of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Waterloo and senior author of the paper. "This drop in confidence was mirrored by a corresponding drop in intentions to use the technology in the near future."

Earlier research shows that people who use smartphone and [web apps](#) to manage chronic diseases follow their doctors' recommendations more closely and make positive changes in their health, at least among those already positively inclined toward such technology. In diabetes management, technology can provide platforms for glucose logs, dietary and physical activity journals, and create opportunities for scheduled

prompting or interventions.

"It may be that [older adults](#) are unaware of apps available, they had low confidence about using them regularly, or both," said Kathleen Dobson, a graduate student and lead author on the paper.

Despite the low use of [assistive technology](#) among older adults, the majority of study participants felt that adopting Internet or smartphone applications to manage their diabetes was a good idea. More than two-thirds intended to adopt assistive technology moving forward.

"Successful [diabetes management](#) improves quality of life, reduces risk of complications and generally extends life expectancy," said Professor Hall. "My hope is that we can find ways to encourage adoption of these new self-management tools, even among those older adults who don't consider themselves to be especially tech-savvy."

The development of senior-friendly apps that are easier to see and use along with encouragement from health-care practitioners to use assistive technology could help increase the number of older adults who use their phones and computers as tools to better manage their diabetes. Raising awareness about existing applications and boosting confidence is also key in increasing the use of assistive technology among older adults.

A future phase of this research will involve seniors who aren't tech-savvy to determine their receptivity to different types of applications.

Provided by University of Waterloo

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