

# Mobile technology may help people improve health behaviors

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Smartphone applications and wearable sensors have the potential to help people make healthier lifestyle choices, but scientific evidence of mobile health technologies' effectiveness for reducing risk factors for heart disease and stroke is limited, according to a scientific statement from the American Heart Association, published in the association's journal *Circulation*.

The new statement reviewed the small body of published, peer-reviewed studies about the effectiveness of mobile health technologies (mHealth) for managing [weight](#), increasing physical activity, quitting smoking and controlling [high blood pressure](#), high cholesterol and diabetes.

"The fact that mobile health technologies haven't been fully studied doesn't mean that they are not effective. Self-monitoring is one of the core strategies for changing cardiovascular health behaviors. If a mobile health technology, such as a smartphone app for self-monitoring diet, weight or physical activity, is helping you improve your behavior, then stick with it," said Lora E. Burke, Ph.D., M.P.H., lead author of the statement and professor of nursing and epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh.

Currently, one in five American adults use some technology to track health data and the most popular health apps downloaded are related to exercise, counting steps, or heart rate.

The mHealth technologies examined in the statement correspond to the

goals in the American Heart Association's Life's Simple 7, which are seven simple ways to improve your heart health - eating better, being more active, managing your weight, avoiding tobacco smoke, reducing blood sugar, and controlling both cholesterol and blood pressure. Here are some of the statement's findings:

**Managing Weight** —People who include mobile technology in a comprehensive lifestyle program for [weight loss](#) were more successful in short-term weight loss compared to those who tried to lose weight on their own, but there isn't any published data on whether the participants maintained their weight loss beyond 12 months. When considering an mHealth weight loss program, healthcare practitioners should look for one that has many of the same elements as successful person-to-person individualized programs administered by healthcare professionals, which emphasize a calorie-controlled diet, physical activity, self-monitoring or recording food intake and physical activity in a paper or digital diary, personalized feedback and social support.

**Physical activity** —While the majority of studies show that using an online program boosted physical activity more than not using one, there hasn't been enough research to show whether wearable [physical activity](#) monitoring devices actually help you move more.

**Smoking cessation** —Mobile phone apps using text messaging to help quit smoking can almost double your chances of quitting, but about 90 percent of people using these apps fail to quit smoking after six months. Mobile health apps used in combination with a traditional quit-smoking program may help smokers kick the habit.

Currently, there is little or no U.S.-based mHealth technology research on diabetes, [blood pressure](#) or cholesterol management.

Statement authors reviewed mHealth randomized clinical trials and meta-

analyses from the last decade. Most mHealth technology studies were short-term and limited in size.

"Nevertheless, don't dismiss the possibility that these devices and apps can help you be heart healthy," Burke said.

To choose a [mobile health](#) technology that works for you, ask your healthcare provider, fitness instructor, registered dietitian or similar expert, to help find an effective program, she added.

The statement also encouraged researchers to embrace the challenge of producing the needed evidence regarding how effective these new technologies are and how we can best adopt them into clinical practice to promote better patient health.

Provided by American Heart Association

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