

Current apps on weight management have not been certified by authorities, no published data on their effectiveness

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Overweight and obese people are turning to a multitude of smartphone apps to help them lose weight. But new research presented at the European Obesity Summit (Gothenburg, Sweden, June 1-4) says that only 17 (0.5%) of the apps identified by the researchers have been developed by a certified health organisation or university. Nor are there any published evidence of effectiveness for weight-loss or weight-gain prevention apps.

Overweight and obesity is a major health challenge worldwide, demanding new, cost-effective approaches for life-long treatment and prevention. The mobile 'app' technology revolution offers new potential approaches for receptive, younger, people, who are vulnerable to obesity but currently 'hard-to-reach' for obesity prevention.

In this study, Dr Charoula Nikolaou, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium and Professor Mike Lean, University of Glasgow, UK, assessed the current mobile apps market for [weight](#) management. They searched Apple iTunes App-store and Google Play Store, in US, UK, and Singapore using key words: 'weight', 'weight-management', 'calorie' to identify relevant apps, and recorded price, download-frequency, customer-rating and details about the app developer.

A total of 3,013 available relevant apps were identified. A total of 666,169,136 downloads had been made. Google Play Store had 2,196

apps (1,808 (82%) free), and Apple iTunes had 817 (352 (43%) free), available. Google Play Store had almost twice the proportion of apps available free of charge compared to Apple iTunes store. Identified apps' content was mainly on body weight, exercise and calorie intake recording and monitoring. The most popular apps currently in the market are: fitbit, my fitness pal and Noom weight loss coach.

The authors say: "As far as we can see, none of the apps identified has been developed by a certified health organisation or university. There are no published data on effectiveness of apps for weight management or weight-gain prevention, to date."

They conclude: "Obesity now affects about 40% of people by age 65. It can only be prevented by effective interventions to change the diets and lifestyles for the 90% of young people who are not yet obese. Apps on lifestyle advice for [weight management](#) are very popular. They offer a huge opportunity to provide effective weight control for vulnerable young people, but currently they all lack certified content-expertise or evidence of effectiveness. Transferring previously-tested, effective, professionally-designed online weight control materials into 'app' form would assure content-quality, for use and evaluation in clinical or public health settings."

More information: [easo.org/wp-content/uploads/20 ...
06/posterfriapps.pdf](https://easo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/posterfriapps.pdf)

Provided by European Association for the Study of Obesity

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