

# Smartphones new weapon in war against anxiety

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New research has revealed that apps installed on smartphones can be used to significantly reduce anxiety.

Joseph Firth, from The University of Manchester, led the first ever meta-analysis of all published evidence on the effect of smartphone-based therapies on anxiety in 1,837 people.

The study, published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, is a collaboration between The University of Manchester, Harvard University, University of Melbourne and the Black Dog Institute in Australia.

It showed that overall, [smartphone](#) interventions reduced anxiety significantly more than control conditions – suggesting new digital therapies could be useful for managing the condition.

Smartphone apps, argue the team, may be best used for augmenting face-to-face therapy and other psychological treatment – rather than replacing standard care.

Because psychologists are seeing increasing numbers of young people suffering from [anxiety disorders](#), [mental health](#) services struggle to meet their needs.

But up to now, the effectiveness of using apps to reduce and manage anxiety as a possible solution to the problem - has been heavily disputed.

Joseph Firth said: "Smartphones could be a novel way to help treat anxiety: they are now owned by the majority of people, and are particularly popular with younger people.

"And that presents a new opportunity for psychological care provision in a non-stigmatizing, self-managing format.

"Looking at individual studies we find that [smartphone apps](#) which aim to promote overall mental health and well-being, rather than focusing

specifically on anxiety alone, may be most consistently effective.

"There is currently no evidence to suggest that using apps alone can outperform standard psychological therapies, or replace the use of anti-anxiety medications. This is an area for future research to explore."

Dr. John Torous from Harvard University said "As digital technologies continue to advance, and our scientific understanding of mental health deepens, smartphones may well present a novel method for wide-scale delivery of personalized, effective and affordable treatment for [anxiety](#) and other mental disorders."

**More information:** Joseph Firth et al. Can smartphone mental health interventions reduce symptoms of anxiety? A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2017.04.046](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.04.046)

Provided by University of Manchester

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