

## Fitbits could lead to negative impact on pupils' well-being, study finds

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Credit: University of Birmingham

Pupils in secondary schools are reluctant to see fitness and health tracking devices such as Fitbits introduced into Physical Exercise lessons in schools and the device could potentially cause a negative impact on

students' overall well-being, research led by the University of Birmingham has found.

In a new study, published today in *Sport, Education and Society*, researchers looked at the responses of 13 and 14 year olds taking part in Physical Exercise classes at two UK [secondary schools](#) over an eight-week period.

The study, carried out in collaboration with Brunel University London and Örebro University in Sweden, focussed on young people's use of a Fitbit and its associated [health](#) app.

Despite the initial enthusiasm towards meeting the Fitbit's daily 10,000-step goal, this was short-lived. The students' physical activity levels declined steadily over time, suggesting that the use of a Fitbit to encourage higher activity levels is not a viable long-term solution.

Additionally, researchers discovered the use of Fitbits resulted in feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem among pupils who did not complete 10,000 daily steps, as they had not hit their daily target. Pupils felt the 10,000 daily step goal to be too prescriptive, and they did not want teachers to impose step or calorie-based targets due to the additional pressure and stress it would place upon them.

Lead author Dr Victoria Goodyear, of the School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Birmingham, comments: "New fitness and lifestyle tracking devices, like Fitbits, are often seen as a solution to physical inactivity in young people and are being used more and more within educational settings.

"Initially the students taking part in our study were encouraged to do more physical activity by the daily 10,000 step and calorie burning targets set by the Fitbit [device](#).

"However, we found that pupils began comparing their levels of health and [activity](#) with their peers and were clearly equating fitness and good health to being either 'fit' or 'not being fat'.

"We found that wearing a Fitbit demotivated them, [physical activity levels](#) declined, and the device made them feel inadequate.

"In turn, the young people resisted the educational value of the Fitbit and demonstrated a sceptical stance towards introducing health devices in [school](#) and physical education settings.

"Teachers, policy makers and health professionals must be aware that the use of health and fitness technologies in schools could have serious negative consequences for young people's health. To encourage positive impacts, young people's viewpoints must be sought."

With the use of wearable health devices in schools becoming increasingly common, where they are often seen as a viable method of addressing rising levels of obesity and sedentary behaviour, the authors call for educators to develop [young people's](#) awareness of these devices if they are to prove a success.

**More information:** Victoria A. Goodyear et al. Young people's uses of wearable healthy lifestyle technologies; surveillance, self-surveillance and resistance, *Sport, Education and Society* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2017.1375907](#)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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