

Mental health mobile apps are effective self-help tools, study shows

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Student using an app for mental health. Credit: BYU

When it comes to strengthening your mental or emotional health, would you trust an app?

A trio of Brigham Young University [health](#) science researchers has published new research that says the answer is yes.

The group was looking to identify what it is about [health apps](#) that influences users' behavior. Over three studies, they surveyed roughly 600 people who had used diet, physical activity or mental health apps in the past six months.

The findings for diet and fitness app users were as expected: more than 90 percent of users reported an increase in their desire and motivation to eat healthy and be physically active. But the really good—and fascinating—news was the response from mental and [emotional health](#) app users: 90 percent reported increased motivation, confidence, intention and attitudes about being mentally and emotionally healthy.

"Our findings show that mental and emotional health focused apps have the ability to positively change behavior," said Ben Crookston, associate professor of health science at BYU. "This is great news for people looking for inexpensive, easily accessible resources to help combat mental and emotional health illness and challenges."

While mobile mental and emotional health apps are not the most traditional approach, these findings suggest that they may be a worthwhile tool for addressing mental health in individuals and increasing self-efficacy.

[Research](#) shows that people who struggle with mental and emotional health problems feel like they lack control. While there are many problems that should be addressed by a professional, users can now take confidence that resources they can use on their own really are effective.

Understanding how these self-help apps promote behavior change will not only help individuals but also health providers working with those

struggling with these kinds of problems, researchers said.

"These apps are engaging and if we can get people to use them more often, the potential certainly exists to help people change their behavior," said co-author Josh West.

The BYU [health science](#) professors hope to continue studying this topic by looking into what kind of apps are most effective at improving mental and emotional wellness (meditation prayer, faith-based scripture, medication adherence, mood tracker, stress management or positive affirmation).

The three research studies were published in *JMIR mHealth* and *uHealth*.

See each of the studies by clicking the links below:

Mental and emotional health apps: mental.jmir.org/2017/4/e45/

Dieting apps: mhealth.jmir.org/2017/7/e95/

Physical health apps: mhealth.jmir.org/2017/8/e114/

More information: Benjamin T Crookston et al, Mental and Emotional Self-Help Technology Apps: Cross-Sectional Study of Theory, Technology, and Mental Health Behaviors, *JMIR Mental Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.2196/mental.7262](https://doi.org/10.2196/mental.7262)

Provided by Brigham Young University

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