

Wearable devices and mobile health technology—one step towards better health

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With increasing efforts being made to address the current global obesity epidemic, wearable devices and mobile health ("mHealth") technology have emerged as promising tools for promoting physical activity.

However, current literature seems to indicate that these new technologies may serve best as part of a larger overall health plan, rather than working alone to encourage weight loss.

In a review for this week's *Current Opinion in Endocrinology, Diabetes and Obesity*, Nicole Spartano, Ph.D., research assistant professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine, comments that recent literature shows that self-monitoring behavior has a role in encouraging weight loss, but may not be enough to keep people healthy when used without thought to behavioral strategies. "There is not sufficient evidence that wearable devices can promote sustained behavior change and long-term weight maintenance on their own." She cites one study in which a game-based intervention produced significant improvement in step counts compared to a group of individuals using a fitness tracker without an incentive program, concluding that "using social or financial incentives and techniques like gamification may support motivation of [behavior change](#)".

Spartano also has concern about groups being left behind with wearable device and [mobile health](#) technology-based [weight](#) loss studies. "Strategies for research study recruitment and, more importantly, for implementing wearable and mHealth technology into a clinical setting or community public health program (in schools, workplace, church or other community-setting) require extra thought and cultural sensitivity to ensure the equity in potential public resources and opportunities."

Ultimately, she is optimistic about the role these technologies may play in developing [weight loss](#) and overall health strategies between patients and their primary care providers. "Integration of mHealth technology and [wearable devices](#) in primary care settings presents an opportunity to capitalize on the routine relationship that patients and providers have."

More information: Kaitlyn M. Riffenburg et al, Physical activity and

weight maintenance, *Current Opinion in Endocrinology & Diabetes and Obesity* (2018). [DOI: 10.1097/MED.0000000000000433](https://doi.org/10.1097/MED.0000000000000433)

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