

'Apple Watch or it doesn't count': How tech addiction might be ruining your workout

May 16 2019, by Dalvin Brown, Usa Today



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Brittany McCrary, 29, bought an Apple Watch Series 3 in 2018 solely for its fitness tracking functions.

The clinical research specialist uses the watch to monitor her [heart rate](#), count calories and challenge friends to reach [fitness](#) goals. Like most people who use fitness trackers, she receives daily reminders to perform tasks like standing, breathing and drinking water.

The Atlanta resident said that she's become so reliant on the watch's tracking capabilities that if the battery dies, or if she forgets the device at home, then she "literally can't really work out. I've left the gym before because I didn't have it."

"It's 2019. Apple Watch or it doesn't count."

Technology has reinvented the way many of us engage with exercise.

Experts say that fitness trackers can motivate us to get moving, however, unfavorable readings can lead to [low self-esteem](#) and feelings of guilt. Studies show that smartphones encourage people to hit the gym, while also inhibiting their ability to do so safely and efficiently.

And those are just some of the many ways that technology could be ruining your workout.

Fitness trackers

"I once knew someone who came to the gym and blew off her trainer because she left her Fitbit at home," said Rolando Garcia, general manager at Life Time Fitness in New York City.

"She decided to cancel a training session because she didn't have a wearable that would help her track her heart rate. There lies the issue regarding dependency."

Wearables and trackers offer instantly updated fitness metrics that either

give you goals or ask you to create your own. Once you reach those goals, you're rewarded with digital prize notifications. However, focusing on the numbers on your wrist takes the emphasis away from how you feel and outsources your decision making to a device, Garcia said.

"Tech is supposed to be assisting us. But now, we are working out for the technology," Garcia said.

What's even more alarming is that the data that we depend on isn't always precise.

In 2018, a study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found that the accuracy of [fitness trackers](#) varies widely depending on the metrics. And a 2017 Stanford study found that 6 out of 7 wearable devices were good at measuring heart rate, however, none measured energy expenditure or calories burned very well.

"Fitness trackers are sometimes inaccurate, which is a problem because you don't know if you're in that 'sometimes' group or not," said Andrew Galpin, a professor of kinesiology at the Center for Sport Performance at California State University, Fullerton.

While many people buy trackers for motivation, the devices can also have the opposite effect, Galpin said.

"If you're supposed to walk 10,000 steps, and you look at your tracker at 8 p.m. and you've only walked a thousand, you may just quit. You may just get discouraged."

Social media

When your phone is with you in the gym, distractions hide behind every

corner.

Experts say that being constantly connected to the outside world reduces the amount of time you spend training your body.

"Just from observation, we've noticed that after someone completes a set, they immediately pick up their phone," said Michael Rebold, department chair of the integrative exercise science program at Hiram College in Ohio.

Rebold has taken the lead on several college student studies involving the pros and cons of working out while connected.

"What we're finding is that when you use your cellphone while resistance training, you're actually doing less amount of exercise. Maybe you're checking [social media](#) or work-related emails, but you're more likely to spend more time overall engaging in exercise if you left the device at home."

Rebold said taking your smartphone with you is a "double-edged sword though because some people enjoy engaging in exercise more if they have their phone present."

Experts say that following fitness instructors on Instagram also has its perils, as does measuring your progress in likes, favorites and comments.

"You might be exposing yourself to people who are self-assigned authorities who aren't properly trained to be giving others fitness advice," Garcia said. He also said that taking selfies at the gym reinforces the mentality that you may be seeking outside validation in order for your workouts to matter.

"The greatest trap in all of fitness," Garcia said, "is when we compare

our efforts to the efforts of other people.. Exercise is the pursuit of a healthy way of life. That is undermined when we use tech to compare ourselves through social media to the success of other people."

Texting

Sending text messages and DMs might also be killing your odds of reaching your summer body goals.

A study by Hiram College and Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania found that texting or talking on the phone while exercising not only decreases your workout intensity, but it also affects your balance.

"If you're jogging and engaging in a text, what commonly happens is you'll decrease your speed to accommodate that conversation," says Rebold. "When you're using your cellphone, it's taking you into a low-intensity exercise. So you're basically working out for nothing."

To have actual health benefits, the American College of Sports Medicine says workouts have to be moderately engaging—as in engaging your muscles and cardiovascular system more than your screen-swiping thumbs.

The study found that balance and stability are negatively impacted by 45% when you're working out while on the phone.

"This would lead us to speculate that you are at risk of maybe falling off the treadmill, or experiencing lower orthopedic issues with your knees, ankles and hips," Rebold said.

Still, there's a bright side.

Listening to music on a smartphone had no notable impact on balance, so

gym-goers can feel free to use iTunes, Spotify or Apple Music. Rebold's research found that listening to music during exercise can actually boost workout intensity and enjoyability. So you don't need to ditch your power playlists.

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Citation: 'Apple Watch or it doesn't count': How tech addiction might be ruining your workout (2019, May 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-apple-doesnt-tech-addiction-workout.html>

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