

A third of people in Wales use digital technology to self-diagnose

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More than a third of people in Wales (34 percent) use digital technology to self-diagnose health conditions, whilst only 14 percent make a healthcare appointment online.

These insights are from a [novel survey](#) exploring how people in Wales use digital technology to support and monitor their [health](#), by Public Health Wales and Bangor University.

Two in three people (66 percent) in Wales use digital technology to support their health through different actions, including finding information about [general health](#) or [health services](#), managing long-term [health conditions](#) and medications.

More than one in three people (34 percent) use digital technology to monitor their health, including step count, fitness levels, food intake—but there are marked differences across social groups.

84 percent of people in the least deprived group use digital technology to support their health, but only 51 percent in the most deprived group.

The findings highlight important considerations for [health systems](#) seeking to harness this digital age to ensure that those who have the greatest needs are not left behind.

Dr. Alisha Davies, Head of Research and Development for Public Health Wales, said:

"It is great to see people in Wales are embracing the potential of technology to support their health, and although more common in the younger age groups, older populations are active online too.

"We need to capitalize on this interest, to engage users in the development of digital health technology and to understand what works to improve health and wellbeing.

"We also need to make sure that everyone has the potential to benefit. A focus on digital should not reinforce underlying inequalities and

inequities in health, to ensure those who have the greatest needs are not left behind."

The report also highlights a disparity in the use of digital technology for health depending on underlying health.

For example, 34 percent of people with no health-harming behaviors—specifically being a current smoker, regularly binge drinking or being physically inactive—use digital technology to support their health. This falls to nearly half that number (19 percent) for people who engage in two or three health-harming behaviors.

Other key findings in the report include:

- Nearly twice as many women (39 percent) than men (20 percent of men) use digital technology to monitor their health
- 10 percent of people use digital [technology](#) to find [emotional support](#) online, and this was higher in those with low mental wellbeing
- 16 percent use [digital technology](#) to manage a long-term health condition

Co-author Dr. Catherine Sharp, Research Officer, Public Health Collaborating Unit, Bangor University, said:

"Our study shows that around one in four people in Wales are already using digital devices to monitor activities like their step count and fitness. We need to build on the investments people are already making to improve their health.

"However, we must also ensure that technological opportunities for health improvement benefit the health of all people in Wales and do not add to the already substantive difference in health between the richest

and the poorest."

The nationally representative survey was administered through face-to-face interviews of 1,240 individuals aged 16 years and above, and resident in Wales.

More information: Davies AR, Sharp CA, Homolova L, Bellis MA (2019). Population health in a digital age: The use of digital technology to support and monitor health in Wales. Public Health Wales & Bangor University. ISBN: 978-1-78986-060-3

To read the full survey online, visit: [phw.nhs.wales/files/research/p ... th-in-a-digital-age/](https://phw.nhs.wales/files/research/p...-in-a-digital-age/)

Provided by Bangor University

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