

Many popular nutrition apps lack behavior change content features

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Many consumers seek technology to support weight management efforts. Fortunately, there are many free and paid versions of nutrition smartphone apps that possess an abundance of features dedicated to

dietary intake, anthropometrics, and physical activity. Unfortunately, they are notably devoid of content features dedicated to behavior change according to a new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, published by Elsevier.

"This paper is part of a larger project that takes a closer look at the utility of diet and nutrition smartphone applications, or apps. We examine their ability to serve as [behavior](#) change support systems for addressing weight management, specifically with the hopes of determining to what extent they're suitable for supporting aspects of the nutrition care process in dietetic practice," said Telema Briggs, BS, Department of Nutritional Sciences, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, U.S.

This study analyzed top-performing diet and nutrition apps and provides an overview of the available features and capabilities that those apps possess. Further, it compares what is offered in free versions of apps versus what they provide in their upgraded, premium versions. Reviewers assessed free and upgraded versions of 15 nutrition apps for features within four categories: [dietary intake](#), anthropometric tracking, physical activity, and behavior change or motivational interviewing.

"The study was designed to answer three questions. What type of features is typically present in popular diet and nutrition apps? Two, how does the feature availability change once these apps are upgraded to their premium versions? And three, are there any associations between feature inclusion in how well an app performs in the platform marketplace using app metadata such as ratings, editor's choice designations, and the number of installations."

This study contributes to the growing body of literature that describes the capabilities of [nutrition](#) apps. Findings from this study suggested that the inclusion of behavior change features did not seem to be a significant

factor in influencing average app ratings, cost, or the number of installations. Of the hypothesized associations between metadata and the overall total number of app features, only app subscription cost was found to be positively correlated with the number of features.

"The heterogeneity of these apps is probably one of the most fascinating things we've uncovered in this project. They all essentially help guide users to issues that are related to weight management, but in slightly different ways. So, we have some apps that are more focused on [behavior change](#), others on dietary intake and [physical activity](#). Some do a great job connecting nutrient intake with risk for disease, while others are great at helping decision-making processes when shopping for groceries or ordering food at restaurants. And so, the good news is that there's really something for everybody," Briggs said.

More information: Telema Briggs et al, Feature Availability Comparison in Free and Paid Versions of Popular Smartphone Weight Management Applications, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2021.05.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2021.05.010)

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