

Research Roundup

Wearable technology not a good “fit” for all

For several years, smart technology has allowed many people to track everything from physical activity to sleep and everything between. But, does this technology really help? Two recent studies evaluated the effectiveness of technology and what happens when we stop wearing the technology.

Researchers hypothesized wearable technology would be a better diet aid than standard behavioral weight loss intervention and discovered just the opposite. Their findings, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, revealed that after tracking two groups for a two-year weight loss study,



weight change varied greatly among the 471 adult participants. The group who wore fitness trackers (enhanced intervention group) lost an average of 7.7 lbs. compared to the 13 lbs. lost by those not wearing a tracker (standard intervention group). Both groups received standard tips about nutrition and physical activity. Both groups had significant improvements in body composition, fitness, physical activity and diet with no significant difference between groups.

According to the lead researcher, their study surprisingly demonstrated no advantage in wearing a fitness monitoring device to provide feedback on physical activity when compared to participants following standard behavioral weight loss approaches.

So, that raises the question whether should people bother with fitness trackers?

Researchers from the University of Washington sought to find an answer by studying 141 individuals who stopped using their Fitbit™ wristband monitors. The results surprised the research team.

“People felt guilty when they abandoned their health tracking devices,” explained the lead research author. “Half of the participants described feeling guilty about their lapsed use, and nearly all of those said they would like to return to activity tracking. About 15 percent said they perceived no value from tracking and found it annoying or struggled to connect the data to behavior change and three percent said they had learned enough. The remaining 32 percent reported mixed feelings.”

Researchers also found that lapsed users responded differently to seeing their old Fitbit data presented in new ways such as visualizations showing which days they were active or displayed their entire activity record. “Most people preferred social comparison that made them look better than their peers such as ‘you walked more than 70 percent of most people’ over the more negative statement of ‘30 percent of people walked more than you.’”

Based upon their findings, the researchers said more research needs to be done because the “one-size-fits-all design” approach misses opportunities to support different types of users and help them maintain and track their chosen physical activity.