

Mobile apps lift health mindfulness

 By [Amr Shady](#)

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With weight-related complications claiming the lives of around 3.4 million adults annually, demand is rising for thousands of mobile applications used daily to track calories, activity levels and vital health signs such as heartrate and blood pressure.

"Helping consumers choose healthy diets" is this year's theme for World Consumer Rights Day. Marking Sunday, 15 March, the event aimed at bringing into the spotlight the dangers of unhealthy diets, focusing on consumers' rights to healthy food. The population of obese people reached 600 million in 2014 to comprise 31 percent of the total 1.9 billion overweight adults, according to the World Health Organisation. Overeating poses more threats to health than does eating poorly across the world; the only exception being famine-hit regions such as sub-Saharan Africa.

Helping users lead a healthier life

While many blame technology for such alarming statistics, along with the considerable decline in people's physical activity, the growing number of health and fitness mobile applications could help mobile users lead a healthier life. Further proof that disruptive mobile technologies can positively impact people's lives; helping them avoid obesity health complications including heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.



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Data points derived from mobile app analytics signal that consumer health consciousness is undergoing a massive transformation. A study published by the app analytics provider Flurry revealed that the first half of 2014 witnessed a "stunning" 62 percent increase in health and fitness app usage. The study also reported that there are over 6,800 apps under the health and fitness category on the App Store.

There are more than 3.6 billion mobile phone subscribers in the world today, and the number is expected to surge by 1 billion over the next five years to reach 4.6 billion by 2020, according to 'The Mobile Economy: 2015' report, issued by GSMA at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) held earlier this month.

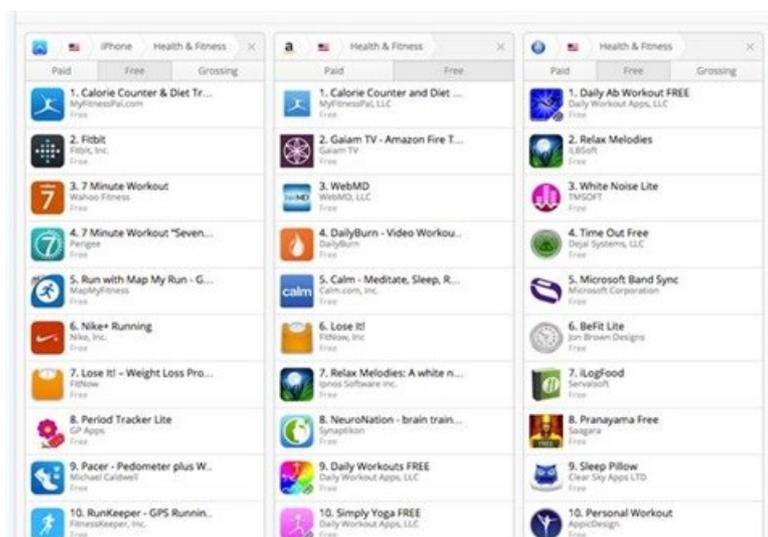
People are more connected than ever before with access to massive amounts of data at the click of a button. In their quest to shed weight and lead a healthy life, mobile users download apps that monitor their vitals and track their eating and exercise habits. The integration of such apps with social media further empowers users, as they connect with each other on this health-seeking journey.

"Friends can cheer each other on, like and share their achievements and even start competing against each other. This innovation has increased the viral distribution of these apps through the social networking channel," says Flurry's report, which cites MapMyFitness as a "great example" of an app that is well-integrated with Facebook.

Healthy social networks

Maintaining health and losing weight is easier with support. Mobile apps that allow dieters to share their successes and failures with others via social networks have a higher chance of producing more successful results. The use of social media in weight loss and health management allows users to post their goals for everyone to see, adding the benefit of accountability to the journey. Mobile app users can also keep a virtual diary that tracks what they eat and their level of activity.

There are plenty of great free apps that can help people get into shape and cut out foods they may not even realise are seriously unhealthy. The following figure (retrieved on 11 March) shows the top 10 ranking free health and fitness apps on appfigures.com. MyFitnessPal app ranks first on the US iPhone and Amazon app stores. The application tracks calories, keeps a food diary and has a database of over 5 million foods.



A recent study by the Archives of Internal Medicine suggests that those who use mobile apps to track their eating habits and count calories generally lose more weight than those who don't. The proliferation and success of mobile health and fitness apps is paving the way for the fast adoption of wearable technologies that serve the same cause. The Apple Watch, recently introduced to the market, promises to provide consumers with a full picture of their daily activity. The watch's Activity app promises to "help motivate you to sit less, move more, and get some exercise."

Mobile and wearable technology offer great support to people who want to lose weight and stay fit. But when it comes to adopting a healthy lifestyle, a commitment to eat better and healthier, is the first step towards creating a new, happier person.

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