

Fitness Tracking OPTION OR OBSESSION?



In an age of self-improvement, where health and fitness is key, the rise of wearable monitoring technology is hardly surprising. But when does calorie counting turn from an option to an obsession?

Words Josh Wilde

Photos courtesy of Fitbit and Josh Wilde

Beads of perspiration form across furrowed brows. The gentle whirr of gym machinery coincides with the incessant thud of pounding shoes.

Health improvement can be defined in different ways. For some, it means working off that Christmas weight. For others, it's a way of life.

Kim Campbell was given an Apple Watch as a present last Christmas. Having become interested in running, she wanted to track her progress and admits it's become an obsession.

"I run three times a week," she says. "I'm in a running club where we've all got some form of monitoring device. They get quite excited when they've hit their 10,000 steps."

Kim says she doesn't have "a particularly addictive personality. I do check it every couple of hours though.

"I looked at my watch last night, bearing in mind I'd done a 10km race yesterday. It told me I hadn't stood enough, so I got up at half-past 11 to reach my target of standing for 12 hours."

Kim laughed, before adding: "Maybe you can say it's slightly addictive."

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

For the £8.00 cost of an off-peak cinema ticket or a couple of glossy fitness magazines, consumers can buy a TW64 Smart Bracelet.

It's water resistant and bluetooth enabled,

while also equipped with its own digital clock, activity, steps and sleep tracker.

Alarms can be set to remind users when to wake up, drink water and move around if they've been inactive.

Reviews are largely positive, with one person even comparing it to the much more expensive brand leader Fitbit for its high accuracy.

Pretty neat for a device which costs less than the average main course in a restaurant.

WHY PAY THE DIFFERENCE?

Fitbit will replace a faulty device free of charge, within a year of purchase.



“For the price you pay, I think they’re brilliant,” says professional footballer and Fitbit user Matt Dolan.



“I wear mine every day and I find it massively useful in the summer when I’m away from the football club. It gives me everything I need.

“In our dressing room, everyone tracks themselves and has a heart rate monitor. It’s massive across football.

“I also use mine for clocking sleep. It buzzes when I should go to bed.

“When I get to 10,000 steps, there’s that sense of achievement. If I miss my target, I feel like I’ve let it down.”

FITBIT’S GLOBAL DOMINANCE

Having pioneered the wearable tech sector, Fitbit’s dominance has helped to fuel their success.

Fitbit, Apple and Samsung brand leaders for first-time wearable consumers



■ Apple (21.78%)	■ Fitbit (21.78%)	■ Samsung (16.83%)	
■ Google (4.95%)	■ LG (3.96%)	■ Garmin (2.97%)	■ Nike (1.98%)
■ Sony (1.98%)	■ Other (11.88%)	■ Don't Know (11.88%)	

Source: YouGov survey (November 2016)

They have the largest fitness community, their app is the most widely available, and they’re at the forefront of new research.

Whole social networks have sprung up in reaction to this phenomena, allowing people to share their progress and encourage fellow users to reach their goals.

The general lower accuracy of economy models may also be a deciding factor for users.

THE STATS

According to a YouGov UK study, 3.6 million people owned a wearable device last February, an increase of 750,000 from the previous quarter.

As technology gets more advanced, previous versions become cheaper and more accessible to the wider public.

Some argue wearable devices have gone one step too far. Telegraph Columnist Alan Tyers is a fierce critic of wearables, writing in 2014, that it’s “a step towards detaching us all from actual life”.

FOLLOWING THE U.S. MODEL

Eric Pilkington is a Wearable Tech Expert and Senior Principle at the U.S. Boston Consultant Group Digital Ventures.

He tests products for wearable companies and is the

Contributing Editor for technology news website Digital Trends.

He said: “Wearable tech’s been around for quite some time and started to achieve some scale in the U.S. around five years ago.

“The technology is starting to catch up with its early promise. Data accuracy has to improve but once that happens, we’ll see a willingness to use wearables to better manage medical conditions.

“There’s a false sense of obsession in many instances. In the U.S., wearables tend to have a shelf life of six weeks to three months.

“Most consumers don’t know what to do with the data. Many people have an underwhelming experience.

“I think the UK is following a similar trajectory to the U.S. Over here, one in five consumers own a wearable. In the UK, it’s one in six. We’ve been stuck at that number for some time so we’re hitting the proverbial ceiling.

“The newer phenomenon is smart fabrics. Evolving technology is capable of tracking a range of metrics that are critically important to many.

“We’re starting to see devices that break free of the commodity zone and are capable of measuring respiration, perspiration, and hydration.”

Every day, millions of UK citizens wake up to the glowing screen of their wearable tech. Every night, millions of UK citizens go to bed while their device tracks their sleep. **Option or obsession?** Like any addiction, it depends who you ask.

“There’s a false sense of obsession ... many people have an underwhelming experience”

