

mHealth No Support for Hearts



The American Heart Association has issued a report highlighting the need for more evaluative studies on the effectiveness of mobile health technologies — including mHealth apps and wearables — for reducing risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

The report, "Current Science on Consumer Use of Mobile Health for Cardiovascular Disease Prevention - A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association," is published in the journal *Circulation*. Its authors reviewed mHealth randomised clinical trials and meta-analyses from the past decade finding that most of these studies were short-term and limited in size. For example, in terms of managing weight, the authors found that use of mobile technology in a lifestyle programme for weight loss was helpful in achieving short-term weight loss goals, but there is no published data on whether the participants maintained their weight loss beyond 12 months.

While the majority of studies show that using an online programme boosted physical activity more than not using one, the report authors cite the lack of definitive research on whether wearable physical activity monitoring devices actually help users to move more. Some studies also have reported that mobile phone apps using text messaging can almost double a person's chances of quitting smoking, but the authors note that nearly 90 percent of people using these apps fail to quit smoking after six months.

Given the lack of scientific evidence regarding the impact of mobile technologies on health outcomes, the heart association says doctors are not inclined to recommend mHealth apps to their patients.

In addition, data show that one in five American adults use some technology to track health information and the most popular health apps are related to exercise, counting steps, or heart rate. However, the report authors found that there is little or no U.S.-based mHealth technology research on diabetes, blood pressure or cholesterol management — major risk factors for cardiovascular disease. In the absence of research data, the report notes that clinicians should not conclude that mhealth technologies are generally unproven and thus can be ignored.

"The fact that mobile health technologies haven't been fully studied doesn't mean that they are not effective," says Lora E. Burke, PhD, lead author of the scientific statement and professor of nursing and epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh. "Self-monitoring is one of the core strategies for changing cardiovascular health behaviours. If a mobile health technology, such as a smartphone app for self-monitoring diet, weight or physical activity, is helping you improve your behaviour, then stick with it."

In the future, technology developers will likely come under mounting pressure from regulatory agencies to produce evidence of effectiveness before marketing. The responsibility of producing this evidence, the report says, should not fall solely only on the product developers. The research and clinical communities should help generate these needed data, the report adds.

Source: [American Heart Association](#)

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