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HEALTH

DIGITAL FITNESS: Tiny electronic devices help people plan, track and evaluate their workouts

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They're not just for talking, playing games or text messaging anymore. Cell phones are the new personal trainers for those who are looking to exercise more than their jaws.

And that iPod? Sure, it's great for listening to music, but download a fitness routine onto it and you've got an instant gym pal, too. Technology is going healthy, which means that tech-loving fitness buffs can turn to their watches, cell phones, iPods and computers to count daily calorie intake, measure body mass, track workout progress and exercise with a virtual personal trainer. David Howell, who owns Total Runner in Southfield, says he uses a Garmin watch with GPS when he's out running and kayaking to measure his distances and speeds. "It's invaluable because when you're out on the water, you have no idea how far you're going," says Howell, 55, of Riverview. "It allows you to focus more on what you're doing because you're getting instant feedback." It's not just exercisers who can look to technology for health help.

Those who want to track their food intake can turn to programs like My Food Phone, which launched earlier this year in the United States. Users of that program snap pictures using their cell phones of everything they eat and e-mail it to a Web site, where they keep food journals and get nutrition analysis from My Food Phone advisers. For Howell, being able to accurately track workouts has helped him train harder. He's also heard from runners who have used the GPS watches to find their way back when running in unfamiliar places. "Obviously people have trained for running without this kind of thing," Howell said. "But I know that when I started using it, I wished I had had it 20 years ago."

Today, we look at a few of the gadgets and Web sites fusing fitness and technology.
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