



- [Home](#)
- [News](#) ▶
- [Technology](#) ▶
- [Markets](#) ▶
- [Personal Journal](#) ▶
- [Opinion](#) ▶
- [Leisure/Weekend](#) ▶

**The Print Edition**[Today's Edition](#)[Past Editions](#)**Features**[Portfolio](#)[Columnists](#)[In-Depth Reports](#)[Discussions](#)[Company Research](#)[Markets Data Center](#)[Video Center](#)[Site Map](#)[Corrections](#)**My Online Journal**[Personalize My News](#)[E-Mail Setup](#)[My Account/Billing](#)[RSS Feeds](#)**Customer Service**[The Online Journal](#)[The Print Edition](#)[Contact Us](#)[Help](#)[Subscribe](#)**BARRON'S**Online**GADGETS**

## New Gadgets Aim to Help Users Watch Their Weight

By VAUHINI VARA  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL ONLINE  
May 12, 2005

(See [Corrections & Amplifications](#) item [below](#).)

Myra Slepoy doesn't go out to dinner without her PDA.

The 44-year-old real estate agent has followed the Weight Watchers diet program for more than 15 years. Until recently, that meant hauling around a notebook and keeping a written diary of everything she ate -- a "laborious" process, she says. But late last year, Ms. Slepoy began using a new Weight Watchers service to track her eating habits on her Palm hand-held computer.

"Who wants to pull out a Weight Watchers book? It's the size of a textbook," she says. Now, when she goes out to eat with her friends, she uses the device to figure out, say, whether to order an appetizer or glass of wine with dinner. The gadget has nutritional information on thousands of items and keeps a tally of what she's already eaten that day. She says it has been much easier to maintain her target weight since ditching the paper journal.

**PUTTING IT TO THE TEST**

Reporter Sara Schaefer Muñoz spent a week using the MyFoodPhone service. [Read her account.](#)

In recent months, several services have sprung up that let people use their cellphones or other

gadgets to design workout schedules, decide which menu items at a restaurant are compatible with their diets, and even use their camera-equipped cellphones to send snapshots of their meals to a dietitian for review.

The companies behind the services are eager to attract business in a growing, but competitive, market. About 71 million people in the U.S. dieted in 2004, and the weight-loss industry took in revenue of \$46.3 billion -- up 6.1% from 2003 and 16% from 2002, according to Tampa, Fla., research firm Marketdata Enterprises Inc.

[EMAIL](#) [PRINT](#)

Start a **FREE** trial of the **Online Journal**



Subscribe to **The Print Journal**

**Free US Quotes:**

Symbol

Name

Get **FREE E-Mail** by topic

Check Out our **Mobile & Wireless Services**

**DIGEST OF EARNINGS**

Details of the latest corporate earnings reported for **FREE**.

**▶ ALSO ON GADGETS**

- [The Hand-Helds Strike Back](#)
- [Videogames Upgrade Graphics](#)

[MORE](#)

**OTHER RESOURCES**

Read "[reviews of reviews](#)" that help you evaluate consumer electronics products through our partnership with ConsumerSearch.com.

advertisement

## Visit the new Video Center



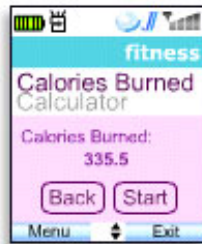
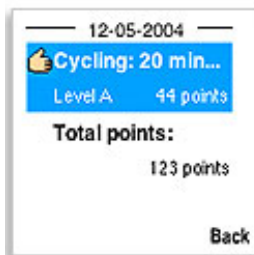
Brought to you by



Fitness companies hope to use the high-tech services to satisfy customers who don't want to carry around journals to track their exercise or diet goals -- a traditional way of keeping tabs on fitness. They hope the tools will help people keep closer track of their goals while on the go: It's easy to forget a notebook at home, but people are almost certain to have their cellphone with them.

### Photographing Your Lunch

One of the most unusual services is called MyFoodPhone, from Quebec City-based NATS Inc. Customers use any camera-equipped cellphones to send snapshots of their meals to a Web site and receive advice from a registered dietitian on how to modify eating habits to reach weight or health goals. The service isn't cheap: a monthly subscription normally costs \$149 (the site is offering a limited-time promotion for \$99 a month), and that doesn't include the phone. ([Read a first-hand account](#) of using MyFoodPhone.)



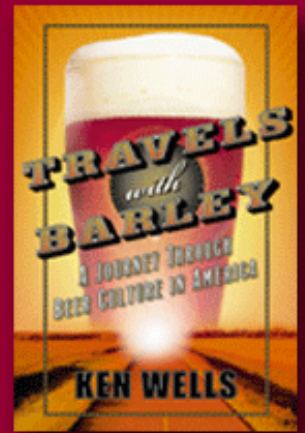
From top to bottom: The Weight Watchers On-The-Go program lets people use their Palm hand-held devices to keep track of how much they've eaten; the Nokia 5140 includes a virtual "fitness coach" that helps users train for a marathon; and the NEC Fitness Phone comes with calculators that compute how many calories have been burned.

handles electronic publishing for the South Beach Diet empire.

The company says the service can help keep dieters honest. With a traditional food journal, people with the best of intentions can underestimate portion sizes -- something a dietitian can correct when looking at a photo of, say, a steak that takes up the whole plate. "This is a way to take a registered dietitian with you to every meal," Marc Onigman, vice president of business development at NATS, a two-year-old company that develops software for monitoring health through mobile devices. He says about 150 people have signed up for the MyFoodPhone service since its launch in February.

Meanwhile, Hudson, Mass.-based Skyscape Inc., which sells software that lets doctors and nurses download medical references to their PDAs, is aiming at dieters with a \$19.95-a-year service called the South Beach Diet OnHand, developed in conjunction with Waterfront Media Inc., the company that

## A BOOK FOR WHAT ALES YOU.



"A joy.... It will inspire readers everywhere to remain sober until they're finished."

—Michael Lewis, author of *Liar's Poker* and *Moneyball*

(CLICK HERE)

### Advertiser Links

#### Featured Sponsor

Cisco Systems Presents: **"Boardroom Connection"**  
A forum for leadership through technology innovation  
[Click Here ...](#)

[Investor Resource Center](#)

[FedEx Presents: "Small Business Center"](#)

[Questions for the Future: Issues that will Shape Our Future](#)

[Get IBM's On Demand Business e-newsletter](#)

### COMPANIES

	Dow Jones, Reuters
<a href="#">Weight Watchers International Inc. (WTW)</a>	
PRICE	48.11
CHANGE	1.08
U.S. dollars	5/17

\* At Market Close

### RELATED INDUSTRIES

- [Health](#)
- [Internet & Online](#)

### Personalized Home Page Setup

Put headlines on your homepage about the companies, industries and topics that interest you most.

30 free trades at  
Ameritrade.

Accenture Presents:  
"High Performance"

Financial HP  
Workstations at PC  
Prices

After downloading Skyscape's software to their hand-held device or cellphone, users can look up diet-appropriate recipes by searching for an ingredient while they're in the grocery store, or find out what to order in a restaurant. While mulling what to order from a Chinese menu, for example, a user can pull up a restaurant guide that offers this diet advice: Avoid lo mein, Peking duck and anything with added cornstarch, and instead try an egg drop soup or a plate of steamed vegetables.

The PDA-based service from WeightWatchers.com, called Weight Watchers On-The-Go, is free for people who attend meetings and pay a \$12.95 monthly subscription to the Web site, which contains diet information. Those who don't attend meetings pay \$21.95 a month for access to the site and the On-The-Go service. It costs \$10.95 to \$14.95 a week to attend regular Weight Watchers meetings, based on location. (WeightWatchers.com Inc. is a privately held affiliate of [Weight Watchers International Inc.](#))

### **Fitness Phones**

Several cellphone makers are also getting into the act, taking aim at health and fitness enthusiasts as they seek to boost slowing sales growth of mobile phones.

When Scott Brown, a 36-year-old in Murrieta, Calif., started training for the Los Angeles Marathon in March, he used a "virtual fitness coach" feature on Nokia Corp.'s 5140 phone to help him plan his workout schedule over several weeks. The tool asked him to input information about himself and his fitness goals. When he typed in that he planned to run a marathon in five months, the phone returned a day-by-day training schedule. Each day, Mr. Brown checked his phone before heading out for his workout, and soon, his two training partners became dependent on it, too. "They'd say, 'Okay, Scott, what are we doing today?'" recalls Mr. Brown, who won the phone in a contest sponsored by Nokia.

The phone, which Nokia started selling in the U.S. in January, also comes with an on-screen compass and a flashlight. The latter rarely comes in handy during workouts, Mr. Brown says -- but he often turns it on when he drops his keys in the car.

Another phone introduced in December by Tokyo-based NEC Corp. shows animated figures demonstrating workout routines and has calculators that can compute figures like target heart rate and nutritional needs based on information the user enters using the phone's keypad. Both the Nokia and NEC phones sell for about \$250.

A few companies are waiting it out before introducing fitness phones in the U.S. In Korea, phones from Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd. and LG Electronics Inc. let users measure things like body fat by touching their finger to a sensor and also link up users with health-care counselors. (Spokeswomen for the companies say there are no immediate plans to launch versions of those phones in the U.S.)

### **High-Tech Workouts**

The new services are part of a growing use of technology in fitness, says Brooke MacInnis, a spokeswoman for the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, a trade group for health clubs. "People not only desire technology, they come to expect it," she says.

In a recent study at the Stanford Prevention Research Center at the Stanford University School of Medicine, researchers gave hand-held devices to 20 people aged 50 years old and up to help track their fitness goals. At the end of an eight-week period, the group had increased the amount of time spent on "brisk walking" sevenfold -- more than twice the growth seen in a control group that was given pamphlets with health and fitness information instead of the gadgets.

"We and our colleagues really are beginning to appreciate the advantages of these sorts of technology," says Abby C. King, a professor at the medical school. "People carry them around on a daily basis. It becomes a very simple, mindless way of tracking what they're doing, and that's what people like." (The devices were designed by the researchers, and aren't available to the public.)

But some nutrition experts warn that users shouldn't rely too much on gadgetry to stay in shape. The success of a diet or workout regimen depends on the individual, not the technology, says Susan Kleiner, a nutritionist in Mercer Island, Wash. "It doesn't matter what kind of fancy gadget you've got to tell you how to exercise," she says. "You still have to go out and exercise. In the end, the onus is on you."

Ms. Kleiner has a decidedly low-tech approach to fitness: She hands out sheets of paper with icons representing various food groups. When a client eats a piece of fruit for breakfast, he uses a pen to scratch out an icon shaped like an apple. "It's pretty simplistic," she says. "But it works."

-- Sara Schaefer Muñoz contributed to this article.

**Write to** Vauhini Vara at [vauhini.vara@wsj.com](mailto:vauhini.vara@wsj.com)

**Corrections & Amplifications:** The weight-loss industry took in revenue of \$46.3 billion in 2004 -- up 16% from 2002, according to Marketdata Enterprises Inc. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said the growth was 24%.

 [FORMAT FOR PRINTING](#)

Sponsored by

**XEROX**

[Return To Top](#)

---

[Subscribe](#) [Log In](#) [Take a Tour](#) [Contact Us](#) [Help](#) [E-Mail Setup](#) [Customer Service: Online | Print](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) [Subscriber Agreement](#) [Mobile Devices](#) [RSS Feeds](#) [News Licensing](#) [About Dow Jones](#)

Copyright © 2005 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

**DOW JONES**

