

# high-tech WEIGHT LOSS

nutrition

**Shape puts the latest electronic tools to the test to see if they can help you drop pounds.** By Bethany Gumper

Savvy dieters know that tracking what they eat is the key to their weight-loss success. "Keeping a food journal increases your awareness of what you're putting in your mouth," says Cleveland-based American Dietetic Association spokeswoman Cindy Moore, M.S., R.D. But these days, few of us still use spiral-bound notebooks.

Now, a slew of high-tech handheld devices use bytes to help you track your bites. In an effort to lose a few extra pounds, boost my diet's nutrition and curb my junk-food addictions, I road-tested three different programs on three separate devices for two weeks each: a cell phone to create a video clip of my meals, which I sent to a nutritionist; a Palm Pilot to aid me in following Weight Watchers' Points system; and a BlackBerry that calculated how many daily calories I needed for weight loss.



A cell phone with a camera allows you to easily track what you eat.

These gadgets definitely work – I shed an average of a pound a week using each one and was able to retool my diet to include more whole grains, fruits and veggies and less processed foods and sweets. To learn how I did it and see if taking your diet high-tech is right for you, read on.

## MyFoodPhone

**How it works** Before meals, you grab your phone and snap a brief video clip or picture of your food, then press "send" to transmit it to a registered dietitian assigned to you by MyFoodPhone. At least once a week, you log on to *myfoodphone.com* to get video feedback from your R.D. and view your progress.

**In the real world** There's no deterrent to unhealthy eating like being forced to show a weight-loss expert everything you consume. Tempe, Ariz.-based nutritionist Amanda Carlson, M.S., R.D., observed my typical habits for a few days. During the week, I usually have oatmeal and coffee loaded with cream and sugar for breakfast, a sandwich or salad with soda for lunch, an afternoon chocolate fix of a cookie or a few Hershey's Kisses, followed by pasta or chicken and veggies for dinner, with an ice-cream bar

**Knowing that an R.D. will actually see what you eat makes you choosy.**

for dessert. On the weekend, I'm much worse: Happy hours and dinners out with friends or my boyfriend mean wine and high-fat, high-calorie fare. Carlson's daily dietary Rx: Get in five or six mini-meals (300 calories each) to keep my energy up and stop afternoon snack attacks, consume three servings of dairy or take calcium supplements (1,000 milligrams) to help prevent osteoporosis, drink eight glasses of water and include fruits and veggies with each meal.

Initially, I was daunted by her to-do list, but it was surprisingly easy to follow. I stuck to oatmeal for breakfast but packed healthy snacks to eat throughout the day – apples with peanut butter, cottage cheese, carrot sticks, turkey sandwiches and string cheese. ➤

Although snapping my food at restaurants was embarrassing, it worked! At happy hour, a co-worker offered me greasy chicken strips. I was tempted but didn't want to photograph it, so I ordered a plain baked potato and salad instead.

### Weight Watchers On-the-Go

**How it works** This sidekick to Weight Watchers Online lets you follow the Flex Plan (you track foods' "Points") or the no-counting Core Plan (you eat only from a list of approved foods) without attending a single meeting. You download the Weight Watchers On-the-Go application from [weightwatchers.com](http://weightwatchers.com) (using a PC with Windows 98 or newer) to a handheld device via the USB HotSync cable that comes with your handheld. Your PDA must run the Palm operating system version 3.5 or higher (this includes Palm, Handspring, Sony and Dell models, but not the popular BlackBerry). Then, scroll through a database of 27,000-plus foods and track how many points you've consumed or select the foods you've eaten from a Core-friendly list. Synchronizing the data between your PDA and your account on [weightwatchers.com](http://weightwatchers.com) is easy – you just make sure the HotSync

.com offers motivation and inspiration: meal ideas, 38 message boards and a database of 1,000 recipes.

An added benefit of Weight Watchers On-the-Go: My workout incentive skyrocketed. Once I learned that I could earn Activity Points for my workouts and swap them for Food Points, I'd find myself on the treadmill thinking, "Just run for five more minutes! Forty-five minutes equals five points, which equals one Starbucks Grande nonfat Caffè Mocha!"

### 2Thumbz Calorie Counter

**How it works** Register your Java-enabled cell phone (most new phones support Java applications) for a Calorie Counter account at [unc.2thumbz.com](http://unc.2thumbz.com), and wait for the prompt to download the application to your phone. Enter your height and weight, and it will determine how many calories you need daily to meet a weight-loss goal by a set date. Track your food intake by selecting foods and beverages from a 500-item database; then upload your data from your phone to the website using the Calorie Counter software (no cables or special accessories necessary, and your computer can be a Mac or a PC – it just needs to have a web browser). On the website, see how your diet stacks

fect: between 1,700 and 1,750 calories a day. But my daily nutrient intake was a far cry from the USDA Dietary Guidelines: There were only 10 grams of fiber in my diet (the recommended is 25), and my sodium was through the roof at 3,500 milligrams (the recommended is 2,300). So I added berries to my oatmeal, packed whole-grain sandwiches for lunch, ate low-sodium legumes with dinner and cut back on processed foods. When I checked the website a week later, my diet was back on track.

## These gadgets definitely work! Our tester achieved a 1-pound-per-week weight loss with each one.

cable is connected to your handheld and your PC and push the "HotSync" button on your PDA.

**In the real world** I chose the Flex Plan. Based on my height and weight, Weight Watchers granted me 20 daily points (along with a 35-point allowance to spread out during the week). I soon learned that 20 points don't go very far. One instant-oatmeal packet for breakfast and poof! Three points gone. A cup of fat-free cottage cheese and a banana for lunch cost me five, and a Weight Watchers frozen dinner and a salad with ranch dressing knocked down eight more. My remaining four points left little room for lattes, treats or even healthy snacks like an apple.

Logging my points on the Palm wasn't as embarrassing, but it was harder to stay on track without a dietitian checking up on me. But that's not to say I was on my own. *Weightwatchers*

up to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Dietary Guidelines.

**In the real world** Need to drop 20 pounds by Thanksgiving? This tool is for you! When I set a goal of 2 pounds in two weeks, the Calorie Counter told me that, with moderate exercise three to five days a week, I needed to consume no more than 1,718 calories per day. Since I was already used to eating smaller portions from my experience with MyFoodPhone and Weight Watchers, this was no problem.

I ran the Calorie Counter on a BlackBerry, but you don't need a PDA; it will run on any handheld device that supports Java text. It was easy to enter the foods and watch my calories. This program put me in control; with no nutritionist checking up on me, and no message boards offering encouragement, I had to make sure I kept myself on track.

When I logged on to the website on day three, my calorie charts were per-

## the skinny on weight-loss gadgets

### MyFoodPhone

**Price** \$99 per month (includes weekly feedback from a nutritionist and access to subscription-only areas of [myfoodphone.com](http://myfoodphone.com); doesn't include phone or cell-phone service)

**Works on** Any camera- or video-enabled cell phone and all major U.S. cell-service carriers

**Best for** The lazy dieter who has trouble committing to a healthy lifestyle

**Info** [myfoodphone.com](http://myfoodphone.com)



### Weight Watchers On-the-Go

**Price** \$30 sign-up fee, plus \$17 per month for Weight Watchers Online and \$5 per month for Weight Watchers On-the-Go (doesn't include the PDA)

**Works on** Any PDA that runs the Palm operating system, version 3.5 or higher; devices from Palm, Handspring, Sony and Dell will work, but not the BlackBerry or Treo

**Best for** The structure-loving dieter who wants a virtual support group

**Info** (800) 651-6000, [weightwatchers.com/pda](http://weightwatchers.com/pda)



### 2Thumbz Calorie Counter

**Price** \$5 flat fee – plus \$2 per month (or \$20 per year) to store data on the website (not including cell phone/PDA)

**Works on** Any device that supports Java applications; will work on newer cell phones and PDAs like BlackBerry

**Best for** The self-sufficient dieter on a deadline

**Info** [unc.2thumbz.com](http://unc.2thumbz.com)

