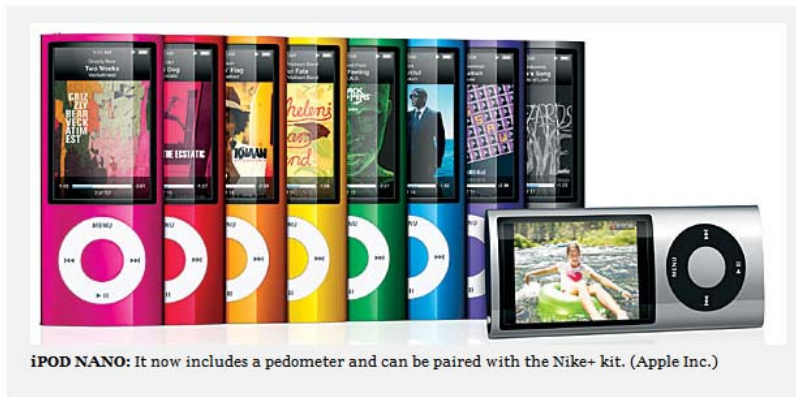


Gizmos get physical

Fitness apps, gadgets and websites log your every move and help motivate and keep track of workouts.



iPOD NANO: It now includes a pedometer and can be paired with the Nike+ kit. (Apple Inc.)

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By Christie Aschwanden
January 4, 2010

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It's almost a New Year's ritual. You set a fitness goal for the fresh year and start with a bang, until losing momentum and eventually grinding to a halt, only to vow you'll do things differently the next year. A fitness log can stop that cycle, even spurring you to greater goals by keeping you accountable and on track.

"Logs offer a great way to document progress -- whether it's in minutes walked or mountains climbed," says Carol Torgan, an exercise physiologist and spokesperson for the American College of Sports Medicine. "A series of blank pages or entry slots can be a powerful motivator."

A fitness diary once meant a notebook and paper, but today's latest gadgets, apps and websites have made logging your fitness goals a high-tech endeavor. Improve your chance of success by picking the one you're most likely to keep using, says Torgan (but keep in mind that calorie and distance measures may not be pinpoint accurate). Here are our picks.

Pedometers

Nike Plus SportBand

Slim and simple, the SportBand features a tiny watch face that shows the time and, when activated, your distance covered. Just place the tiny Nike+ sensor in the foot bed of your shoe and off you go. After your workout, slide the watch face off the band, slip it into your USB hub, and it seamlessly downloads your data to the Nikeplus.com online exercise log where you can track your progress and find training programs and goal-setting suggestions. You can also share your latest workout stats and accomplishments with friends on the site's own social network, or via Facebook or Twitter.

Likes: Affordable, user-friendly, and no confusing add-ons, just the essentials you need.

Dislikes: Sensor most accurate with Nike+ shoes.

Price: \$59; Nikerunning.nike.com

Timex Ironman

Wireless Fitness Tracker

More than just a stylish women's sports watch, this device also wirelessly syncs with an included pedometer. Clip the pedometer on your waistband and the Tracker counts distance, steps, pace and calories and can store up to 50 workouts of data without any fiddling. Designed with fitness walkers in mind, the memory stores workouts by date and tracks best pace, average pace, distance per workout and pace per workout, along with calories burned.

Likes: Simple and user-friendly.

Dislikes: Clip-on pedometer is a tad clunky.

Price: \$90; TimexIronman.com

iPod Nano

The latest Nano, which made its name as a digital music player, also comes with a nifty built-in pedometer, allowing you to cut down on pocket clutter by carrying your music, an HD-video camera and pedometer in one tiny package. Just start the pedometer at the beginning of each day, then slip it into your pocket, and the Nano records every step you take. Pair it with the Nike+ sport kit (\$29, www.apple.com/ipod/nike), and it can also record time, distance and calories burned. With or without the Nike+ kit, you can set it to automatically download your data to the Nikeplus.com online training log.

Likes: Small, intuitive and low-effort.

Dislikes: No clip, so you need a pocket.

Price: 8 GB, \$149, 16 GB, \$179; apple.com

iSteps

A simple pedometer app for the iPhone and iPod Touch, iSteps measures your steps, speed, distance, time and calories. Its built-in log displays your daily steps, distance and calories in an easy-to-read format and can store months' worth of data. The pedometer can run in the background while you listen to music.

Likes: Accurate, easy to use.

Dislikes: The device cannot be used while other apps are running.

Price: \$2.99; Itunes.com

Heart rate monitors

Polar FT7

The company pioneered fitness-oriented heart rate monitors, and the FT7 is an attractive option if you're seeking a simple unit. It records everything from average to maximum heart rate and time spent in pre-programmed target zones, and it can store up to 99 workouts for instant recall on the watch screen. Features programmable workouts, goals and target zones and a variety of timers. Log on to polarpersonaltrainer.com to enter your workouts into the online training log or pair it with the optional FlowLink toggle to automatically download your data into the log.

Likes: Easy-to-read watch face, relatively inexpensive and easy to program.

Dislikes: No Mac compatibility. The manual is required reading.

Price: \$119.95; Polarusa.com

Timex Ironman

Race Trainer

Designed for serious athletes, the Race Trainer captures elapsed time, heart rate data and calories burned and features a 10-workout memory. The wrist unit includes multiple timers and heart rate zone alarms to keep your workout on track. An included USB plug wirelessly downloads data to TimexIronman.com, a feature-rich workout log powered by TrainingPeaks (see below).

Likes: Data are easy to download, and the watch face is sleeker and more attractive than most.

Dislikes: Buttons are small.

Price: \$220; TimexIronman.com

GPS units

Polar FT60 G1

This device records everything from maximum heart rate to calorie expenditure and time in your pre-programmed target zones. The GPS unit measures your speed and distance, and the FlowLink connector transfers data to your PC, which you can upload to the Polar Personal Trainer online workout log. Or, skip the computer and just scroll through the stats from your last 100 workouts on the watch display.

Likes: Has all the features you could dream of in a heart rate monitor.

Dislikes: Incompatible with Macs. Despite the GPS, no mapping capabilities.

Price: \$349.95; Polarusa.com

Garmin 310XT

The ultimate toy for the outdoor fitness freak, this records your location, altitude, elevation change, distance, heart rate and speed. The unit wirelessly downloads data to your computer and then to Garmin Connect, a user-friendly online workout log that uses Google maps to sketch your workout. The log's replay feature reviews your workout step by step to show your elevation, speed and heart rate at every location on the map.

Likes: Tracks everything you could ever want to know about your workout.

Dislikes: Bulky; feels like you're wearing a laptop on your wrist.

Price: \$349.99; Garmin.com

RunKeeper

The RunKeeper app uses the iPhone's built-in GPS to track and record your activities. Turn it on to see your distance, average pace and calories burned. The app also allows you to track your route and elevation and see your path on a map. When you're done with your workout, you can download the data to your personal log on the RunKeeper website and share your progress on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Likes: Pro version syncs with workout-specific music playlists.

Dislikes: The device requires an iPhone.

Price: Free or \$9.99 for Pro version; Runkeeper.com

Web-based logs

TrainingPeaks

This high-end online tool offers a virtual coach to devise a custom training plan and track your workouts, diet and weight. The site can upload and display exercise data from more than 70 types of devices, such as heart rate monitors and GPS units. The premium version displays maps of your workout routes and provides detailed workout and meal analyses.

Likes: Compatible with most pedometers and heart rate monitors and other devices.

Dislikes: Full-featured version is expensive.

Price: Free for the basic version or \$19.95 a month for the premium version; trainingpeaks.com

DailyMile

This simple, Web-based exercise log offers a user-friendly interface. If you're so inclined, you can share your updates on Facebook and Twitter or use the site to find workout buddies in your area or share your progress with friends. The site also features an optional sync function with Nike+.

Likes: Simple interface, great for those seeking social support for their workout goals.

Dislikes: Social-networking focus will not appeal to those who want privacy.

Price: Free; Dailymile.com

Apps

Apps

iFitness

Like a personal trainer in your pocket, the iFitness app for iPhone and iPod Touch illustrates more than 230 exercises along with a variety of pre-programmed workouts. Use one of the 12 pre-programmed routines, or create your own and log it with this nifty app. The included log stores up to a month's worth of workouts and can export your data to e-mail.

Likes: Good photos, lots of workouts and exercises to choose from.

Dislikes: Recording your exercises on the tiny touch screen feels more tedious than pen and paper.

Price: \$1.99; medicalprod.com/fitness.html

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