



American
Heart
Association.



FINDING THE RIGHT HEALTH APP

Health apps can be a great tool for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. And when they're synched with a wearable monitor or tracker, they can improve exercise routines or log valuable data to share with your doctor.

But staying motivated to make and maintain lifestyle changes is key to success.

An app can only help you reach your health goals if you use it.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR CHOOSING A HEALTH APP:

FOCUS ON YOUR GOALS

Before downloading an app, consider what you need to do to achieve your goals and what would help you succeed. Does the app connect with a larger community to help motivate you? Is it easy to use? A diet tracker that requires complicated food entry each day may lose its appeal after a few days.

GET RECOMMENDATIONS

Ask your health care professional to suggest health apps that have worked for other patients with similar goals. Features that incorporate self-monitoring, which is key to changing behavior, are important. An emphasis on elements you'd find in a person-to-person program such as calorie-controlled diets, physical activity, feedback and social support are also key.

AVOID APPS THAT PROMISE TOO MUCH.

Making lifestyle changes to move the needle on unhealthy habits takes time, so be skeptical if an app claims it can help you get results fast. Instead, look for evidence-based strategies to make lasting behavior changes, including self-monitoring, goal settings, cues or push notifications, social support and rewards. And be cautious about apps that are developed to sell a specific product.

DON'T RELY ON RATINGS

Studies have shown ratings are not correlated with quality or safety. In fact, a review in *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* found dozens of apps that offered poor and even harmful advice. Instead, stick to apps from or approved by credible sources such as health care professionals, health organizations or government agencies.

CHECK FOR REGULAR UPDATES

A 2019 *BMJ* study found apps not updated within the past six months tended to raise more safety concerns.

FIND OUT WHO DEVELOPED IT

Has the app been developed by an organization that designs other health apps or has a long track record? Has it been endorsed by any health organizations or were any health care professionals consulted to develop it? A diet app developed by a registered dietitian may be more useful than one developed by someone who's not.

READ REVIEWS

Don't just focus on the number of downloads. Review feedback from long-time users to see what they've experienced. Their experiences may offer insight about pitfalls or challenges you may face using the platform.

UNDERSTAND THE COSTS

Many apps offer free elements, but charge for other features. Read carefully to understand what you'll be able to access and its cost.

TAKE A TEST DRIVE

Try an app out to see if the format works for you. If not, try something else. Don't get discouraged. You may need to try several before finding the best fit.