

Activity Monitors

Many people are now wearing activity monitors to tell them how many steps they walk and how active they are.

It is estimated that up to 10% of the population own an activity monitor, however approximately 30% of these people stop using them within 6 months.

New research has now shown that people wearing activity monitors do not increase their number of steps and only moderately increase their activity levels. Unfortunately these increases were insufficient to have any health benefit.

If you google activity monitors you will find an array of devices with a range of complexity from simple step counters, to trackers that monitor your heart rate, calorie expenditure and number of stairs ascended. There are also numerous reviews of activity monitors. The rating criteria is usually aesthetics, parameters measured, ease of use and associated apps.

One factor these reviews appear to overlook is what is the aim of wearing an activity monitor. In my opinion you should NOT wear a monitor to tell you how many steps you have walked but to ensure you reach a target number of steps. This target can be relatively low initially but should be gradually increased to a level where health benefits can be incurred PROVIDED your walking is supplemented by more vigorous exercise. You should look at your monitor throughout the day to ensure you are on target to reach your goal number of steps.

There are numerous ways to increase the number of steps you take to ensure you attain your target. Some examples of strategies to increase the number of daily steps include:

If your device has an alarm set it for every 60 minutes to ensure you get up and have a walk. Even if it is around your office or home (2 minutes of walking is better than an extra 2 minutes of sitting).

Park your car further away and walk the last part to your destination, alternatively take a walk for a couple of minutes after you have parked rather than go directly to your destination.

When you have completed your shopping walk around the shop before going to the cashier.

Make arrangements with a friend to go for a regular walk, this means you are less likely to defer such activity.

As you make walking part of your daily routine it will become a habit (like cleaning your teeth) that you will do automatically and not have to think about. You can now gradually increase your target number of steps. Do this by approximately 10% each time I.E. go from 4000 to 4400 steps.

Despite many people advocating a minimum of 10,000 steps are required to confer any health benefits there is no research to support this. You should bear in mind that if you only walk 2000 steps a day then increasing this to 4000 over a period of time is an achievement and will confer benefits to you.

Finally remember you are wearing an activity monitor to ensure you reach your target number of steps. Use it for this purpose and go for extra walks or incorporate a walk during other tasks, if you see you are not attaining your daily goal.