



# Fit for purpose?

If your exercise regime is going nowhere, can fitness gadgets, such as heart monitors and pedometers, help you get back on track? We've tested six products to find out

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**W**hile athletes and celebrities have personal trainers to help them achieve their fitness goals, most of us have to look elsewhere for that extra bit of encouragement when we're exercising. Fitness gadgets that monitor your progress can seem like a good idea, but there's little point in spending money on something that gives inaccurate

information or is difficult to use.

To help you choose a fitness gadget that will be really useful as you work out, we've put six products to the test. We wanted to see which ones live up to their claims and which will help you get more from your exercise regime.

We've tested watches and a mobile phone that double as heart-rate monitors, a satnav bike trainer, the Nike+

add-on for the iPod Nano, and a pedometer that measures how far you walk each day. The good news is that, according to our research, all of the heart-rate monitors were sufficiently accurate for their purpose. See p24-25 for our reviews.

**which? MONEY SAVER**  
Gym equipment can monitor your heart rate as you work out, but gym membership costs around £700 a year. Swapping the treadmill for your local park and the Polar F6 heart-rate monitor (£50) would save you £650.

## Our research

We asked fitness expert Andrew Colley (see below) to put six gadgets through an extensive trial and give his professional verdict on each one. To see how the gadgets perform in real life, we also trialled them with amateur sports and fitness enthusiasts.

We sent the heart-rate monitors to a sports science laboratory to check their accuracy. Volunteers exercised on treadmills while hooked up to the monitors and ECG devices, and the read-outs were compared to ensure that the monitors were working correctly.

## OUR EXPERT

Andrew Colley is director of Purus Active Health, a fitness clinic that specialises in injury rehabilitation. He's a qualified sports therapist and personal trainer, and is a former professional footballer. Andrew has also worked as head of the sports therapy unit at West Ham Utd.

He gave each of the six gadgets on p24-25 a thorough workout, and was so impressed with the Polar FT80 monitor and the Nike+ iPod that he bought them for himself.

## Nintendo – Walk with me! £45

The Nintendo Walk with me! game wasn't launched in time to go through our full trial, so we've given it a quick hands-on test instead.

The game comes with two small pedometers. You carry one in your pocket or bag and it monitors



every step you take during the day. A light on the pedometer turns green when you achieve your step 'target'. You can download the pedometer data

to your Nintendo DS or DSi games console. The information is displayed on a timeline that shows how many steps you

took – but unfortunately it doesn't translate that into how far you have walked. There are some mini games to encourage you to exercise more often.

We think the game is more suitable for children than adults – we found the screens of text repetitive and irritating. But it is a bit of fun that could encourage you to get active.





## **POLAR FT80 HEART RATE MONITOR (£250)**

### **What is it?**

A watch/heart-rate monitor that helps you train at the right level.

### **Expert's view**

'It's incredibly useful. Clear instructions help you get the most from the watch. By transferring data to its training website you can keep tabs on your progress. It has bags of features, such as the recovery zone, which tells you

when you're ready to restart exercise. I found it intelligent and inspiring.'

### **Trialist's view**

'It really encouraged me to train sensibly and understand more about my fitness and heart rate. It's very expensive though – I'm gutted I've had to hand it back.'

**Available:**  
John Lewis



## **POLAR F6 (£50)**

### **What is it?**

A watch/heart-rate monitor that tells you how hard your training sessions should be.

### **Expert's view**

'The F6 establishes your training regime based on personal information and accurately records data during exercise. The OwnZone

feature that helps you determine your heart rate before exercise, for setting a safe training level, is a real plus. It'll keep you training hard but safely.'

### **Trialist's view**

'It's easy to set up and gives lots of information about training sessions, including calories burned and heart rate. The website is useful, but it's a pain to transfer data by holding the watch near a computer microphone.'

**Available:** Argos, John Lewis, Tesco



## **SAMSUNG ADIDAS MICOACH F110 (£150)**

### **What is it?**

A mobile phone with MP3 player and fitness training features, including a stride sensor and heart-rate monitor.

### **Expert's view**

'The heart-rate and stride sensors are easy to use, and having a mobile phone with you provides security when running alone. The MP3

player is decent and the headphones stay in place when running, but the arm strap doesn't feel very secure. Training programmes are easy to set up, with loads of options and features.

'It's worth considering if you're looking for a phone that also happens to be a fitness monitor. Otherwise, it's expensive, as there are other, cheaper gadgets that do a similar job. It's a decent bit of

kit, but I don't think a phone is the best training partner.'

### **Trialist's view**

'I wouldn't switch mobiles to get this gadget. The constant verbal encouragement and distance information was annoying, leaving me dreading how far I still had to run rather than motivating me.

'I found the heart-rate monitor useful – it lets you set the type of training required,

such as endurance or strength, and tells you if you're achieving your target. However, I wouldn't choose this as a training gadget – I'd prefer something that doesn't talk back.'

**Available:** Online







helped me adjust my diet. It's simple, effective and great value for money.'

**Triallist's view**

'I really value the Nike+. Listening to music while running is a great motivator. The voice that interrupts your music – telling you how far or how long you've been running – is encouraging. When running regular routes you see your progress clearly.'

'It's a really clever device and very simple to use. Uploading data to the Nike website was easy, and charting my progress was really satisfying. It was particularly helpful when training for my first half-marathon.'

'You don't need the special Nike trainers. I bought a shoe-pouch accessory, which attaches to your laces. However, calibrating it accurately is essential or you'll find yourself running shorter or further than you intend.'

**Available:** Comet, Currys, John Lewis

**NIKE+ iPod (£20 for Nike+ iPod Sport Kit; £100 for iPod Nano)**

**What is it?**

A shoe sensor that wirelessly links to an iPod Nano, turning it into a hi-tech pedometer.

**Expert's view**

'What a great gadget. I love running with my Nano and the Nike+ takes you to the next step, recording your data in a way that's perfect for runners. It's easy to use – information on your progress is supplied through the headphones at the press of a button.'

'It's a breeze to link it to the website, which is easy to navigate and very motivating. I'm impressed by the display of calorie expenditure, which has

**GARMIN EDGE 705 GPS (£380)**

**What is it?**

A GPS (satnav)-enabled cycle computer that wirelessly monitors heart rate and pedalling speed.

**Expert's view**

'A serious piece of equipment to support a fitness regime, but beware of spending too much time playing with the features and cutting into your training

time. It'll provide serious riders with the data necessary to maintain a consistent level in training and evidence of progress, but if you ride a folding commuter bike it's not for you.'

**Triallist's view**

'I found it hard to set up and it's difficult to read the maps when cycling. The GPS is more useful for reviewing your route back home. But once

it was set up, I spent hours analysing the data and graphs, which were excellent for determining fitness levels.'

'It's great fun and, if I were serious about training, it would play a useful role. But it's too expensive – I'd rather spend the money on a new set of wheels.'

**Available:** Specialist cycle shops

**TANITA 3 AXIS PEDOMETER (£24)**

**What is it?**

A pedometer that records steps only when it senses regular movement. It also has a panic alarm.

**Expert's view**

'It stores steps taken, distance covered and calories burned. But I think it's bulky, the panic

alarm isn't sufficiently noisy and it's expensive.'

**Triallist's view**

'It helped motivate me to walk further. It seems more accurate than pedometers I've used before, and I really like the addition of an alarm.'

**Available:** John Lewis