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5 Best Apps to Boost Your Health

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For the more than 68 percent of Americans who own smart phones, it's difficult to imagine doing without them, especially when it comes to your health. Millions use them to keep track of the number of steps they take, the calories they consume, and even the medications or supplements taken each day.

To aid in this process, more than 165,000 healthcare applications have been developed for iPhones and androids — focusing on diet and fitness, as well as the management of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and mental health.

“The technology in healthcare apps has exploded,” IT expert Sanket Shah tells *Newsmax Health*.

But with so many health apps on the market it can be challenging to choose the right app, says Shah, who specializes in helping people find the right technology for healthcare services.

“There are thousands of apps out there and some of it can be overwhelming. Just like trying new hobby or picking out a new pair of pants, you need to see what works for you and what makes you the most comfortable,” says Shah, an instructor in the University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Biomedical and Health Sciences and a part of the [UIC Health Informatics Program](#).

Shah recommends deciding beforehand what you plan to do with an app and choose only one (or more) that will be the most useful. Don't just download apps that will sit on your phone without ever being accessed. His recommendations:

- Avoid the apps that bombard you with ads.
- Consider how user-friendly the app is.
- Read the reviews. Some of the best information can be found in them.
- Realize that nothing is really free. In exchange for that so-called “free” app, you are usually asked to grant permission for your age, email, zip code, and other personal information to used internally, shared, or sold.
- Be careful about add-ons. Many apps charge for additional content or enhanced experiences that require extra purchases and costs. Most apps require a credit card, which means yours is probably on file, so be careful not inadvertently purchase these features.

These are Shah's top five health apps:

HealthTap (Health Tap)

Launched in 2010, this online service provides real-time answers to health questions from more than 107,000 doctors. In an era where Internet services provide thousands of vague results, HealthTap was designed to give patients direct access to health professionals, saving you time and money. You can also pay for a virtual consult to video or text chat with a primary care doctor 24/7 or a doctor of your choice during their “virtual office hours.”

Drink Water Reminder (Leap Fitness Group)

Dehydration can lead to serious health problems. This app lets you calculate your needs based on your gender, weight, and the climate where you live. Taking its lead from apps that remind you to take 10,000 steps a day, this app provides customized tracking and reminders to ensure that you are drinking enough water throughout the day.

Fooducate (Fooducate LTD)

Do you really know what's in the food you eat? Nutritional labels may be misleading, so Fooducate takes all of the guesswork out by providing a grade instantly on the items you buy. Simply scan the UPC code from your mobile camera (over 250,000 items) and the app will grade the product and most importantly, explain why it is healthy or unhealthy, as well as provide alternative choices. A diet and weight loss goal tracker is also included.

Breath2Relax (National Center for Telehealth & Technology)

Oftentimes we focus on the physical aspects of health but our mental health is equally important. Focusing on the mind and taking some time to relax can provide tremendous benefits in your daily life This app provides a guide to simple breathing exercises to help relieve stress and relax.

Down Dog (Yoga Buddhi Co.)

Yoga is gaining in popularity, and there is a reason why this ancient practice has been around for centuries. Improving your mental state and also strengthening your core muscles is the goal of this app, designed for all levels. It provides easy-to-follow tutorials and all you really need to get started is a basic yoga mat.

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