



TECH LINK

Smart Heart Health

February is the month for Valentine's Day where we show our love for others. But, February is also American Heart Month, a perfect opportunity to show some love for ourselves, particularly with regard to heart health. In addition to diet and exercise, there is technology that you can take advantage of to care for your ticker.

There are the traditional products such as blood pressure monitors and heart rate monitors to keep tabs on how your heart is performing. While many of us get our blood pressure tested when we visit the doctor, for anyone with high blood pressure, more frequent measurement is essential. Home monitoring used to mean jotting down readings in a notebook. But many of today's devices store your readings for you. Some even transmit data to your smartphone through Bluetooth technology, and allow you to share that data with your doctor.



Maybe you want to tackle multiple health goals at once. Consider a heart-health app to help you track progress against your goals. Some wearable devices come with their own apps, but even apps not connected to devices can help you log and track important information, such as weight, cholesterol levels and medication. Many apps also provide tips and education on diet, exercise and healthy lifestyle changes. The AARP recommends the free Healthy Heart 2 app for heart disease patients. It can track blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol, blood glucose, medication and more. The American Heart Association has its own free app, My Cardiac Coach, to help heart attack survivors thrive in recovery. That app offers step by step guidance for developing healthy habits and access to a supportive community of fellow heart patients.

When it comes to wearable devices, watches by Fitbit, Apple and Garmin have become mainstream. Now there are even smart rings such as the Oura ring that track sleep and other health predictors with excellent detail. The Oura ring has a unique feature called Symptom Radar that can tell you when you're getting a cold or flu (or Covid), often before you have an indication that you do. This means you can start taking care of yourself to speed your recovery.

While some of us may prefer to avoid the scale, sometimes it can be a helpful tool, particularly when a more advanced BMI scale is used to not only provide weight information but provide body mass index. Scale brands such as Withings and Oxiline provide detailed information beyond a mere weight number. The Withings scales also measures your vascular age and tells you if it aligns with your actual age. It can also provide data on your heart rate and nerve health.

There are also new products and technologies in development to keep on your radar or to talk about with your health care provider:



While test strips are nothing new, they've been used for glucose meters, urine tests, and various other medical applications for decades, a new type of test strip, the Triple Cascade Quantum Strip, measures blood serum and could be a game-changer when it comes to identifying markers of heart failure.

Using blood biomarkers can reveal a lot about a person, and new research has shown that biomarkers can help assess a person's brain health after they go through a cardiac event. This means that someday, doctors could be able to better predict and improve the brain's recovery after a cardiac event with a simple blood test.

Beyond monitoring technology, consider a relaxation app to help with your heart health. The Calm app has a free version to help with mindfulness exercises and breathing techniques to promote mental clarity and relaxation.

As powerful as technology tools are, your best resource for heart-health advice is still your doctor. Some information that wearables and apps provide is easy to understand. But other data - like ECG readings - are best interpreted by a professional. With technology and your doctor on your side, you can look forward to a heart-healthy future.