DIFFERENCES IN EATING BEHAVIOR, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND HEALTH-RELATED LIFESTYLE CHOICES BETWEEN USERS AND NONUSERS OF MOBILE HEALTH APPS

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The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between usages of mobile health applications (apps) designed to track diet and physical activity and health-related behaviors of college students.
Weight gain and lifestyle behaviors during college may contribute to future health problems.

This population may not have sufficient self-monitoring skills to maintain healthy lifestyle behaviors.
ASSESSMENT USING SURVEYS

EATING BEHAVIOR

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

HEALTH-RELATED LIFESTYLE CHOICES
Within the past 12 months, have you used a mobile-based health or fitness app?” If the response was “yes,” the following questions were asked:

• “What application(s) do you use?” (more than one response acceptable)

• “How do you feel about using your mobile-based health or fitness app?”
RESULTS (n = 401)

- MyFitness Pal and Fitbit – most commonly used apps – no differences in type of app

- Mobile health app users:
  - Significantly higher scores for eating behavior than nonusers
  - Using more than one type of mobile health app significantly improved eating behavior

- There was no significance noted for lifestyle and physical activity scores between app users and non-app users
Respondents’ feelings about mobile health app (4:1 positive to negative)

**POSITIVE**
- It helps me keep track of my exercise and food intake
- It helps me manage my weight better
- It makes me feel healthier
- It motivates me to eat healthier and increase my physical activity

**NEGATIVE**
- It makes me feel obsessive about my exercise and food intake
- It creates anxiety/guilt if I do not reach my exercise or food intake goals
- It interferes with my daily activities and/or social life
- It makes me neurotic about my body image
Evaluation of study method

Strengths
- Large sample size
- Range of diversity of subjects from urban and suburban college campuses.

Limitations
- Included a wide variety of mobile health apps utilized by participants
- Use of a survey versus actual measurement of health-related outcomes
Future Research

- Research evaluating types of mobile apps associated with health outcomes.
- Studies analyzing app usage adherence and app preference among target populations are necessary for effective health education and promotion programming.
- Future research on specific behavioral responses about using a health tracking device.