

PERSONAL TECH

Training Apps That Help You Sweat the Details

By ROY FURCHGOTT SEPT. 9, 2009

To prepare for his first marathon last year, Michael Nolan trained for six months with the New York Road Runners Club, running up to 20 miles a day five days a week.

Nevertheless, he finished with an average speed of about 11 minutes a mile, a full 60 seconds a mile off his target pace. This year, he vowed to be faster. “I didn’t want to take that long again,” he said.

So he got a personal trainer. Now as Mr. Nolan prepares for this year’s New York marathon, he is leaner, stronger and “easily” averages eight-and-a-half-minute miles on training runs, he said.

Mr. Nolan’s new workouts are not coached by a running guru, but by iPhone applications that show video workout instructions and tabulate every set of burpees, a full-body exercise for strength training, and step-ups.

The sports and health industries are just beginning to tap the computing power of smartphones. Applications range from simple calorie counters to heart-rate monitors that use complex metabolic calculations.

These apps can help an athlete achieve a personal best, but some doctors say that more important is their ability to produce no-fail routines for the sedentary and obese, which could improve health and drive down medical costs. Here are some of the popular fitness apps out there.

WEIGHT LOSS In theory, losing weight is simple: Just burn more calories than you eat. Martin Gramckow, an avid bicyclist who lives in California, had considered that fact since a cyclist he met on a ride bragged about losing 50 pounds. “I’m huffing and puffing trying to keep with him, while he leisurely pedals along and tells me how he did it,” said Mr. Gramckow.

The answer was calorie-counting. But Mr. Gramckow thought logging every morsel that passed his lips “was always too much work.” Then he saw Calorie Tracker for the iPhone, \$2.99 from LiveStrong.com, an affiliate of the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

As with similar apps, Mr. Gramckow can search for foods by name or meals from restaurant chains and the app calculates and stores all of the nutritional information.

“Sure enough I find a couple of things in my meal plan that are out of whack,” said Mr. Gramckow, who trimmed 10 pounds in less than a month. “I’m not far away from being the fittest I’ve been in a long time,” he said.

Calorie Tracker, which is also available for the BlackBerry (\$2.99), won’t give you a breakdown of proteins, carbohydrates and fats (unless you sync it and view the result on your computer), but a free iPhone app called Lose It! will. The app also allows you to enter the ingredients of your own recipes and store a list of meals you commonly eat.

My Food Diary may have the most complete food database, and it can be accessed from any mobile browser, but it has no phone-specific app. Phone access is free with a \$9 monthly membership to the Web site. Make sure you point your browser to the site formatted for the phone, mobile.myfooddiary.com.

INDOOR FITNESS: FitDeck Mobile (\$4.99 for iPhone, \$14.99 for BlackBerry) was created by a former Navy Seal instructor, Phil Black, as a simple workout that required no equipment. Illustrations show exercises like jumping jacks and push-ups.

Fitsync is a Web site with a collection of workout routines that can be loaded onto phones using Android, Palm or Windows Mobile software as well as an iPhone. The company claims a library of 1,600 exercises organized into more than 400 workouts like “Rock Hard Challenge” and “Bikini Body Cardio.” Scheduled workouts from the Web site can be sent to your phone on workout days. An annual subscription, normally \$39.95, is

being offered at \$2.99 for Android phones.

Mr. Nolan, the marathoner, used apps from PumpOne, which has 20 workout apps for the iPhone, including ones for specific sports like golf or specific goals like burning fat. The newest app from the site, Fitness Builder 2 Plus, has 5,000 images and videos of exercises, and 500 ready-made workout programs for a \$4.99 monthly subscription or a \$99.99 onetime fee. Created by an exercise physiologist, Declan Condrón, the programs can be researched by muscle group, effort level, type of equipment or goal (like speed or strength). It also lets you enter the number of reps and the weight used.

Smheart Link (\$124.95) makes a heart monitor that links to an iPhone. Smheart Link works with four apps that allow gym rats to arrange a display screen to show what they want, like calories burned, average heart rate or elapsed time. It also links to sensors on indoor and outdoor bikes that measure cadence and estimated speed and distance. Hard-core riders can attach a power meter that measures the watts a cyclist generates, a measure bikers often use in competitive training.

For precise data, you can visit a New Leaf-trained technician, who employs metabolic testing equipment to measure your heart and lung efficiency in a grueling aerobic test (average cost \$175-\$200). Using that data, New Leaf sends custom exercise programs to your phone and works like a virtual personal trainer, telling you how high to push your heart rate, when, and for how long.

It also tracks results through the Smheart Link heart monitor. New Leaf's detailed reports show how many fat and carb calories you have burned, and how much time is spent in each of five heart rate zones.

OUTDOOR FITNESS: One of the beauties of a mobile device is that you don't have to be wired to a machine in a gym. Several apps are designed with hiking, biking and running in mind.

MyTracks, a free app for Android phones, uses GPS signals to track your time, distance, speed and elevation as you hit the trail. The data can be loaded into a spreadsheet on Google Docs to determine whether you are getting faster, or you can put the map and statistics in MyMaps to share with friends. You can also send an e-mail message of your route to running buddies from the app. If you want heart-rate data or calories burned, you will need a second

device.

The Nike + iPod Sport Kit is made especially for runners (it can be used in a gym for cardio workouts as well); it tracks time, distance, pace and estimates calories burned. It uses a \$29 sensor compatible with a Nike+ shoe and beams information to an iPod or iPhone. It does take some effort to calibrate. You will need to run a known course to set it up for highest accuracy.

The cycling app iMapMyRide turns the iPhone into a GPS cyclometer, recording time, distance, speed, altitude and estimated calories burned. You can see your position on a map, and it has a button to pause your ride. Your maps and statistics are loaded to the MapMyRide Web site, where you can measure your progress, and, if you like, share your routes with other riders.

MapMyRide has a free app if you don't mind seeing ads, or an ad-free \$4.99 version that also stores more rides and statistics. There is a separate running app as well. The Web site requires a separate subscription, but there is a free option as well as an unlimited-use \$99 annual membership.

There is one respect, however, in which these apps don't go the distance. Powering the screen while also using GPS or a heart monitor (and maybe listening to music as well) will leave your batteries wheezing like a tubby, two-pack-a-day smoker. If you're really into getting fit, your smartphone may hit the wall before you do.

Correction: September 21, 2009

An article in the Personal Tech pages on Sept. 10 reported on smartphone applications to help in fitness and diet programs, including a Calorie Tracker application from LiveStrong.com that was described as free for the iPhone and iPod Touch. After the article was published, it was learned that while the application was free upon its introduction in November 2008, in March 2009 LiveStrong began charging \$2.99 to iPhone and iPod Touch users, the same price it charges for BlackBerry users.

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