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What you need to know about...

FITNESS TRACKERS



What are they?

'Fitness Trackers'

A fitness tracker is a wrist-worn device that can measure your level of physical activity during the day. Each fitness tracker focuses on different things but in general, they tend to count steps taken, record sleep patterns and enable activity goals. They can also monitor heart rate, running distance and more. The first fitness tracker was created by Garmin in 2016 but Fitbit popularised fitness trackers for children by introducing the Fitbit Ace in 2018.

Now they can be synced to children's smartphones and used to make physical activity fun for children by giving out virtual badges or encouraging family challenges.

Advantages

Increase physical activity

Studies have shown that tracking physical activities can motivate people to change their behaviour. Your child can be motivated through virtual prizes, and online badges. They can set realistic goals for themselves and take part in physical challenges. All of this promotes positive behaviour in children.

Health tracking

Fitness trackers can be a good way for you to understand your child's lifestyle and can help you to encourage them to become more physically active if you have any concerns. It can also help you to monitor sleep patterns if you don't think your child is getting enough good sleep through the night.

Healthy motivation

Children may feel encouraged by looking at their data and keeping track of their progress. Children can also share their performance with their friends on social media and, just like how video games would log the scores of the highest players, trackers can provide the same level of motivation.

Spread kindness

The UNICEF Kid Power Band encourages compassion by encouraging children to earn their steps which can be converted to points which is then used to provide food to malnourished children in the world.

Disadvantages

Unhealthy obsession

Just as much as fitness trackers can help stimulate exercise, they can also lead to children becoming obsessed with tracking themselves. Fitness trackers can cause an unhealthy focus on weight for example and instead of making exercising fun, it can lead to stress and lower self-esteem.

Demotivating

Children can lose the motivation to exercise if targets are set too high and they have unrealistic expectations. Not being able to meet their goals can result in children viewing fitness as a chore and giving up, so it's important to always try and make exercise as fun as possible.

Data and privacy leaks

Fitness trackers hold a large amount of information on our children. For example, their name, date of birth, location, sleep pattern and more. There are numerous companies who offer fitness tracking devices so it's important to research companies well before purchasing in order to ensure your child's data will be kept secure and well protected.

Chat to strangers

Most fitness trackers enable wearers to join online communities to share in fitness goals and challenges. These also allow users to add people as friends and chat privately, similar to social media, therefore potentially opening children up to talk to strangers and people they don't know.

Safety Tips

Implement parental controls

Be sure that the fitness tracker for your child comes with parental control features so you can prevent your child from accessing unwanted sites or being contacted by strangers for a fitness challenge.

Read the privacy small print

You might be thinking, why would someone want my child's sleep pattern or want to know how many steps they're taking during the day? Keep in mind that big companies like Google and Facebook make millions through people's data. Always read the privacy policy and if you don't like how the company is going to share your child's data, don't buy it.

Discuss fitness with your child

Have regular conversations with your child about how they feel about wearing a fitness tracker. Talk to them about the pros and cons and, if they are conscious about their weight, that fitness trackers can be used to help motivate them but shouldn't take the enjoyment out of exercise. Help to build their self-worth and improve their confidence in being happy with the way they look and feel about themselves.

Our Expert Parven Kaur



Parven Kaur is social media expert and digital media consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience in the social media arena and is the founder of Kids N Clicks; a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.

