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HOME TECH

## A Dashboard for Your Body

**WITHINGS BP MONITOR** This \$130 machine sends blood-pressure readings to your phone, and saves them for analysis.By FARHAD MANJOO  
Published: August 3, 2011

ONE recent morning, I woke up at 6:45, spent about 20 minutes preparing for the day (mainly this involves my persnickety multistep coffee-making process), and then strolled down the hall to my home office.

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**MYTREK WORKOUT MONITOR** Due out this fall, MyTrek (\$129) tracks pulse, distance and calories, but links only to Apple devices.

In that time, I'd walked only about 400 steps and burned about 200 calories, and things went downhill from there. According to a log created by [Fitbit](#), a tiny gadget that hooks onto my belt loop and tracks my activities, I had only tiny spurts of movement the rest of the workday.

There was a big spike of activity around lunchtime, when I walked about 50 steps to the kitchen and 50 steps back, and a couple other small flurries when I walked to the bathroom or answered the door for the delivery guy. Most of the time, though, I remained parked in front of my computer, as sedentary as a hibernating bear.

Although Fitbit doesn't explicitly acknowledge this in its marketing materials, the gadget makes you feel bad about yourself. The device (\$100) is a super-powered

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**FITBIT TRACKER A** \$100 pedometer-plus that calculates your steps and your sleep movements, and graphs them online.

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**IHEALTH BP MONITOR** iHealth's blood-pressure device works like Withings's and costs \$30 less, but is a hard fit in some phones.

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**WITHINGS SCALE** This device (\$159) tracks weight, fat percentage and body-mass index, and sends the bad news to computers and phones.

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**EXERGEN THERMOMETER** Fever? Slide this \$33 device over a child's (or adult's) forehead for a highly accurate answer.

pedometer; it monitors movement while you sleep as well as counts your steps, and it sends all the data back to Fitbit's Web-based tracking program, which displays your [lethargy](#) on the sort of precise charts and graphs that economists use to monitor recessions.

The theory underlying Fitbit is that once you know where you're failing, you can begin to make healthy changes in your life. And these changes don't have to be very big — for instance, mulling the Fitbit data, I noticed that on the weekend I recorded more than twice as much daily activity as I had on the weekdays. But I don't recall working especially hard on that weekend — I'd just walked around the garden a couple times to water the plants.

And this was the point: I didn't even have to do anything strenuous to get in slightly better shape.

Fitbit is one of the best of several health-related gadgets I've been testing recently. They run the gamut — a few were modern versions of old technology, including a novel body scale, blood-pressure monitors **and one amazing thermometer.**

Others, like the Fitbit, are meant to let you track and display your fitness in the hope that you'll change your lazy ways. But all these devices fit nicely into what has been called [the "self-tracking" or "quantified self" movement](#), in which folks use technology to measure their bodily functions either to improve their health or, increasingly, just to have fun.

Take, for instance, the [MyTrek](#), a wireless pulse monitor made by Scosche. The \$129 workout device, which will go on sale this fall at Apple, Target and 24 Hour Fitness stores, slips around your arm, where it tracks your pulse and your movements.

The MyTrek connects to an [iPhone](#) or [iPod Touch](#), which displays and remembers all your workout statistics.

For instance, it shows a graph of your pulse rate throughout the exercise session, the number of calories you burned, and the distance you traveled. Scosche says that measuring your pulse, rather than just your movement (like the Fitbit), leads to a more accurate

estimate of calories burned.

This may be so, but I was disappointed that the MyTrek data can be viewed only on an Apple device. The company plans an app for Android phones to be released next year, and a representative said it was considering offering ways to view your pulse data on the Web or other devices as well.

I also tested the [Withings WiFi Body Scale](#), which in some respects works like every other bathroom scale: You step on it, it displays your weight.

But then it transmits the data over your home Internet connection to your computer or your phone (it works on Macs and Windows, as well as Android phones, the iPhone, [iPad](#) or iPod Touch). The scale's software displays a graph of your weight over time and calculates your fat percentage and body-mass index. It also lets you create profiles for up to eight people, and track each person's weight on a dedicated graph.

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At \$159, it is pricey for a bathroom scale, but I suspect it will prove useful to dieters and others watching their weight.

Withings also makes [a blood-pressure monitor](#) that works with the iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch. It sells for about \$130, while another Apple-friendly blood-pressure monitor, made by [iHealth](#), sells for about \$100.

I tested both and found the Withings model to be slightly better than iHealth's. For some reason, the iHealth dock wouldn't fit into my phone unless I removed my phone's protective case; I didn't have that problem with the Withings version.

Still, they were both easy to use, and each worked the same way: After connecting it to my phone, I slipped the cuff around my arm and pressed Start. The cuff began to expand, and within a minute my blood-pressure reading appeared on my phone. Each app saves your readings, so you can see how your [blood pressure](#) changes over time.

Adam Lin, the general manager of iHealth, told me that while home blood-pressure devices aren't new, Apple-friendly versions are aimed at a younger set. "The calls we're getting are from people who are 35 or 40, people who are saying they've just been diagnosed with [hypertension](#) and they want this kind of device," he said.

Of all the gadgets I tried, my favorite is the [Exergen TemporalScanner](#), a thermometer that doesn't connect to your phone or to the Web, and doesn't save your data over time. But it allowed me to accurately measure my baby's temperature without removing his clothes, even while he is sleeping.

This was a revelation to me: Pediatricians have long argued that the only accurate way to measure a baby's temperature is rectally. Other methods (under the arm, under the tongue or in the ear canal) give readings that are slightly lower or higher than the true one. The Exergen thermometer, \$33 on Amazon, promises to give a more accurate reading of an infant's temperature, and to do so without disturbing the baby. The thermometer, a small hand-held device, has an infrared scanner at its tip. Place the thermometer on your child's forehead (or your spouse's — it's for adults, too), hit the scan button and slowly slide the thermometer across the skin. The temperature reading appears instantly.

The thermometer was invented by Francesco Pompei, a research scientist and Exergen's founder. He said that the device reads the temperature of the temporal artery, which is in the forehead and has long been considered one of the places near the outside of the body that best reflects "core" temperature.

[A study](#) in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, reflecting this theory, concluded that Exergen's thermometer came far closer than inner-ear thermometers at determining the infants' true temperature, as measured rectally. The study did show that forehead thermometers could not replace rectal thermometers; in some cases, the TemporalScanner missed fevers that were found rectally.

But the TemporalScanner is far more convenient than measuring a baby's temperature rectally, which allows you to measure it more often, sometimes just for the peace of mind of knowing he's O.K. Who can resist?

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