

## **Is Your Fitness Tracker Controlling Your Life?** *Expert weighs in on the effectiveness of wearable tech in exercise routines*

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio – January 2016 – Wearable technology is considered the number one fitness trend in 2016. But after New Year’s resolutions become a daily reality, is your new fitness device destined to become part of your everyday routine or collect dust on a shelf?

Dr. Sam Zizzi, professor of Sport and Exercise Psychology at West Virginia University, Fellow and Certified Consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, provides insight on how your new fitness tracker may hurt or help your performance and how to make it work for you.

“Individuals can break out of the negative cycle that their fitness devices might create by using the data from trackers only as information, not as a judgment of their effort or worth. The idea of ‘failure as information’ links to a more mindful approach to health behavior change where the individual says ‘OK, I am going to be a healthier person no matter what. I am going to try out some different routines and figure out what I like best and how often I can do these things. I’ll use the app/device as a friendly feedback tool and keep making changes until I find something that sticks.’ This is definitely not a common attitude, but it is one that works,” suggests Dr. Zizzi.

In an interview with Dr. Zizzi for the Association for Applied Sport Psychology he touches on:

- Ways individuals can benefit the most from fitness trackers
- How fitness trackers motivate people in the short and long term
- How fitness trackers sometimes contribute to “[false hope syndrome](#),” when high expectations lead to demotivation

The full Q & A interview with Dr. Zizzi follows.

*The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science, and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Since 1986, AASP has been an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 2,000 members in 54 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, [www.appliedsportpsych.org](http://www.appliedsportpsych.org).*

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## **Wearable Technology...Friend or Foe to Exercisers?**

*Sport and Exercise Professor and Researcher Dr. Sam Zizzi Answers the Questions*

Dr. Sam Zizzi is Professor of Sport and Exercise Psychology at West Virginia University and a Fellow and Certified Consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP). He has been teaching and conducting research in sport and exercise psychology for nearly 20 years. He and his colleagues coordinate and evaluate one of the country's largest community-based weight loss programs, the West Virginia Public Employee's Weight Management program.

Dr. Zizzi shared perspectives on the motivational effectiveness of wearable technology. Do fitness trackers and smart watches motivate us or can they be detrimental to long-term exercise behavior and how can individuals can get the most from their device?

**Q: How do fitness trackers affect an individual's motivation in the short-term and long-term?**

**A:** In the short-term, the greatest benefits include improved awareness of current behaviors and instantaneous feedback. The awareness of how much physical activity or caloric intake can help an individual make accurate decisions.

In the long-term, very few people are conscientious enough to stick with these apps. It can get tedious to log your food every day for four months, for example, or to input all of your minutes or sets and reps of exercise into a fitness tracker. As time progresses, you learn less and less from the app because your habits are not that varied. We eat mostly the same foods from week to week, so it can seem repetitive to enter it over and over again. It's also very easy to turn off reminder features, or take off the wearable gadget. The novelty of a fitness tracker will wear off for most people after a few months.

**Q: Is using a fitness tracker more likely to negatively or positively impact a person's motivation?**

**A:** It can go either way. In health behavior change, there is a typical pattern called "[false hope syndrome](#)" where individuals set high goals, then put in less than high effort, then they fail at the goal, then they feel bad and attribute the failure to the difficulty of the task. This negative cycle keeps people from establishing a healthy balance of new behaviors. Trackers could certainly fuel this negative cycle if the individual starts off with unrealistic goals and then feedback from the tracker indicates that they are not achieving the fitness gains or weight loss, so they feel guilty and give up.

**Q: When can wearable technology become detrimental to athletes and exercisers?**

**A:** When fitness devices get in the way of the pure experience of an activity like running, walking, biking or swimming. If the information from the tracker is disruptive or distracting to the pure joy of the activity, the device also has the possibility to undermine our intrinsic or lasting motivation, particularly when users start to feel the device is controlling them instead of the other way around! One must sustain their autonomy or control over these choices or else the device will sap their joy of moving.

**Q: How can people get the best results from their fitness device?**

**A:** Individuals can break out of the negative cycle that their fitness devices might create by using the data from trackers only as information, not as a judgment of their effort or worth. The idea of “failure as information” links to a more mindful approach to health behavior change where the individual says “OK, I am going to be a healthier person no matter what. I am going to try out some different routines and figure out what I like best and how often I can do these things. I’ll use the app/device as a friendly feedback tool and keep making changes until I find something that sticks.” This is definitely not a common attitude, but it is one that works.

**Looking for professional help in exercise adherence?** Consider contacting a Certified Consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology. A listing is available at <http://www.appliedsportpsych.org/certified-consultants/find-a-consultant/>

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