

DAVID REBEDEW, MD

Four Mobile Apps to Encourage Healthy Habits

Recommend these mobile apps to patients as a way to reinforce recommended lifestyle changes.

The beginning of the new year is a natural time for patients to resolve to change their lifestyles, whether that means eating better, getting more exercise, or being more diligent in following their physician's advice.

Given the ubiquity of mobile devices, patients may ask you to recommend applications that can help them achieve their health goals. But combing through the thousands of available apps is not an easy chore. This article attempts to help by reviewing four useful medical apps using *FPM's* "SPPACES" app criteria (see page OA3).

MY DIET COACH

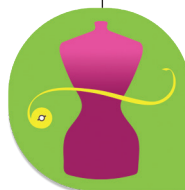
The My Diet Coach app serves as an external motivator for patients to make manageable lifestyle changes.

Source: Anat Levi.

Platforms available: Android (<http://bit.ly/1JOsQHe>); iOS 10.0 or later for iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch (<http://apple.co/2BF8dAN>).

Pertinence to primary care practice: In family medicine, we can encourage patients to lose weight when we see them in our office. However, we are not able to continually remind patients to make good lifestyle choices after they leave. My Diet Coach helps fill this void in patient care.

My Diet Coach lets patients set their own lifestyle goals. Every time patients open the app, they see their reason for trying to lose weight. Patients can use motivational photos, quotes, tricks and tips, and phone reminders to help keep them on track. For example, the app can remind patients to measure their weight, eat more vegetables, drink more water, take the stairs, or fulfill other customized actions. Within the app, patients can log their meals using a barcode scanner, count their calories burned, see how many calories they have left for the day, photograph their meals, and track water intake. With the free version, patients can set one daily challenge, which may be related to physical activity



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Rebedew is a family physician at Monroe Clinic in Albany, Wis., and a faculty member for the University of Illinois Rockford Family Medicine Residency. Author disclosure: no relevant financial affiliations disclosed.

(e.g., going for a walk), eating (e.g., watching serving size), or self-control (e.g., avoiding snacking). As patients continue to meet their daily goals and challenges, their in-app avatar can change in appearance as it loses weight with them. App users can also sign up for a monthly or annual subscription that provides additional coaching features.

Authoritativeness/accuracy/currency of information: No specific sources for the app's information are cited.

Cost: Free for the basic version; \$4.99 per month for the "pro" version.

Ease of use: Startup for the app is quick and simple. Patients enter their weight, height, goal weight, baseline activity level, weekly weight loss goal, and motivation for losing weight. Navigating through the app is seamless. The app can also import data automatically from the Apple Health App and FitBit devices. Content within the app is available in English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Sponsor: Inspired Apps (A.L.) Ltd.

Rating: ★★★★★

My Diet Coach is an essential app for patients who want to make and maintain positive lifestyle changes.



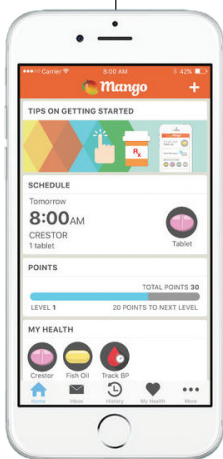
MANGO HEALTH

The Mango Health app helps remind patients to take their medications as well as initiate some healthy lifestyle modifications.

Source: Mango Health.

Platforms available: Android 4.1 or later (<http://bit.ly/17N3nCi>); iOS 8.0 or later for iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch (<http://apple.co/2ixUTqE>).

Pertinence to primary care practice: Poor medication adherence is a well-known problem in primary care. Patients have numerous reasons for not taking their medications, but Mango Health helps eliminate forgetting as one of those reasons. The app allows patients to set reminders and to request refills. Patients can also schedule reminders to track



their blood glucose, blood pressure, mood, and weight. Each time patients take their medications and achieve other goals, they gain points. These points can automatically enter patients to win a weekly raffle for such things as gift cards to popular stores.

Authoritativeness/accuracy/currency of information: Within the app, patients can view Wolters Kluwer Clinical Drug Information about their medications as well as any interactions with food and over-the-counter medications. Unfortunately, the information provided is not comprehensive. Two physicians, Rahul Deo, MD, PhD, and Jane Barlow, MD, MPH, MBA, serve on the advisory board for the app.

Cost: Free.

Ease of use: Entering medications is quick and easy. Patients can enter generic or brand names, and the app updates the appearance of the drug automatically. Patients can then add notes, such as a reminder to take a certain medication with food. The app is available in English only.

Sponsors: Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, Floodgate Fund, First Round Capital, Baseline Ventures, and Bullpen Capital.

Rating: ★★★★★

Mango Health is a great app that gives patients incentives to take their medications reliably.



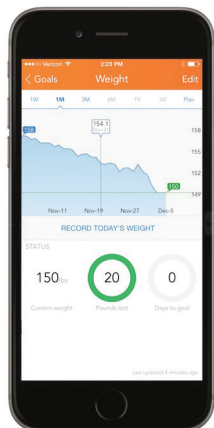
LOSE IT!

This app provides not only amazing calorie and fitness tracking capabilities but also a way to connect to an online weight-loss community.

Source: FitNow, Inc.

Platforms available: Android (<http://bit.ly/1d3rmfQ>); iOS 8.0 or later for iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch (<http://apple.co/2j1wkmm>).

Pertinence to primary care practice: Tracking calories, engaging in regular physical activity, and eating appropriate serving sizes are imperative to any weight-loss strategy. Lose It! provides a template for patients to achieve their fitness goals. Patients can use the app to track calories, body measurements, exercise, weight, and health goals. They can also join weight loss, exercise, and healthy eating challenges with other users within the online community. With the premium version, patients



can plan meals, gain nutrition insights, and get recommendations on how to further their weight loss. A 2015 meta-analysis of weight loss apps showed that use of mobile apps like Lose It! can lead to a significant amount of weight loss.¹

Authoritativeness/accuracy/currency of information:

Among those serving on the Lose It! advisory board are Roshini Raj, MD, a board-certified gastroenterologist and internist; Deborah McConnell, MS, CES, a fitness trainer; and Kristin Kirkpatrick, MS, RD, a dietitian.

Cost: Free for basic version; \$39.99 per year for the premium version.

Ease of use: Tracking calories using Lose It!'s "Snap It" feature or its barcode scanner takes only seconds. The basic version syncs with Apple Health, Google Fit Sync, and Wifi scales. The premium version integrates with FitBit, Misfit, Healthkid, and Withings scales. The app is available in a large number of languages.

Sponsor: Helix.

Rating: ★★★★★

Lose It! is an effective calorie and fitness tracking app for all patients.



PLANT NANNY

This app offers a simple and fun way to encourage patients to drink more water.

Source: Fourdesire Co. Ltd.

Platforms available: Android 4.0 or later (<http://bit.ly/ZhLEyS>); iOS 7.0 or later for iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch (<http://apple.co/2pEijzR>).

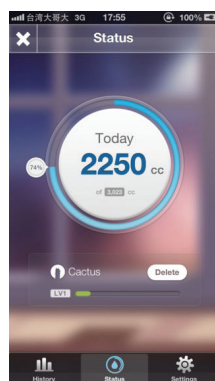
Pertinence to primary care practice: A commonly cited reason for overeating and obesity is that patients choose to consume sugary drinks instead of water. This app encourages water intake in a cute, imaginative way. Patients are charged with caring for a series of cartoon plants that "grow" when the user indicates he or she has consumed a predetermined serving of water.

APP REVIEW CRITERIA

- S – Source or developer of app
- P – Platforms available
- P – Pertinence to primary care practice
- A – Authoritativeness/accuracy/currency of information
- C – Cost
- E – Ease of use
- S – Sponsor(s)

The app also reminds users how many servings they need each day and tracks water consumption over time.

Authoritativeness/accuracy/currency of information: Drinking as little as 500 mL (two cups) of water prior to a meal has been associated with an additional 2 kg of weight loss over a 12-week period.²



Cost: Free, with in-app purchases.

Ease of use: The app is very easy to set up, and it takes just a couple seconds to "water the plant" for each serving of water consumed. App users can earn upgrades as they water their

plant consistently over time, including new plants, flowerpots, and background scenes. In-app advertisements do slow down the app a bit. The app is available in several languages.

Sponsors: None.

Rating: ★★★★★

Plant Nanny is a great all-ages app that encourages daily water consumption. **FPM**

1. Flores MG, Granado-Font E, Ferré-Grau C, Montaña-Carreras X. Mobile phone apps to promote weight loss and increase physical activity: a systemic review and meta-analysis. *J Med Internet Res.* 2015;17(11):e253.

2. Galsziou P, Bennett J, Greenberg P, et al. Pre-meal water consumption for weight loss. *Aust Fam Physician.* 2013;42(7):478.

Send comments to fpmedit@aafp.org, or add your comments to the article online.