

APP OF THE WEEK

Exercise in peer pressure adds competitive edge to fitness

Katie McGregor
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Endomondo Sports Tracker

Free
Rating 8/10

I'm guilty of doing Endomondo a disservice. I took a quick look a while back and decided it was basic and the icon and name irritated me for some reason. A bad day at the office perhaps. But it meant I missed out on Endomondo's strength: it fires up your inner competitiveness, motivating you to exercise ... and then exercise some more.

Like many exercise apps, Endomondo uses the smartphone's global positioning system to track your workout, from mountain biking to walking. Some of the options – such as yoga – seem a bit nonsensical, so I didn't try them out.

As you exercise, you can track your statistics – duration, distance, calorie burn, heart rate (if using a monitor) – either by taking a quick peek at the workout screen, or by choosing to receive updates from a mechanical Endomondo voice. You can challenge yourself with a distance goal, and the app will note your best and worst times. Your route is tracked and can be viewed on a satellite or graphic map.

At the end of your workout, you get a breakdown of more data including average speed, maximum speed, and split times for laps (usually a kilometre long). The app also provides your elevation change during the workout, but this seems unreliable.

Where Endomondo truly shines is through its online features and community function. When you set up the app, you are asked to create



an account. Doing so gives you access to the world of Endomondo, where you can challenge friends or follow a route set by someone else and see how you compare.

I set up a challenge to run 100 kilometres within seven weeks and invited friends and colleagues to do the same. By making the challenge public, my friends were able to invite their friends, so now 10 of us are involved.

Now every time I run with Endomondo, my kilometres are automatically added to that challenge, and any other challenge I may have joined. We are a fired-up group; so much so that even though it is "my" challenge, I'm currently in fifth place. I'm itching to get out and change that, and that is why it works so well.

The "pro" version of Endomondo (US\$3.99) has a little more functionality and allows you to set more personal challenges on the phone itself.

ASK THE DOCTORS

DR RALPH STANLEY

Q: After exercise, when I have pushed myself hard, I often find that one or both of my ears are blocked. Why is this so?

A: The symptoms could be due to one, or a combination, of two reasons.

During exercise, the blood vessels in the body generally dilate (or enlarge). Hence, more blood flows to the muscles and the skin, resulting in facial flushing. This leads to vascular congestion for all the muscles, including those in and around the facial skeleton.

The muscles that surround the Eustachian tube (which is the tube that connects the back of the throat with the middle ear cavity) are also affected by this vascular congestion.

Eustachian tube dysfunction occurs,

leading to blockage of the ears, as transmission of sound in the middle ear is impaired.

After exercise, when the blood vessels return to normal, the congestion is reduced, enabling the Eustachian tube to function properly, and hence the ears get unblocked at rest, restoring normal hearing.

The other possible explanation is that during excessive exercise, many people clench their jaws. The muscular spasm around the Eustachian tube also leads to Eustachian tube dysfunction and ear blockage.

Dr Ralph Stanley is an ear, nose and throat surgeon at Gleneagles Hospital in Singapore

HEALTH BITES

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Make light work of it

Conventional gym wisdom states the way to bigger muscles is lifting heavy weights. But scientists at McMaster University in the Canadian province of Ontario, in a study published last week in *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism*, say lighter weights but with more repetitions may be just as effective. The researchers ran experiments that manipulated various resistance exercise variables (such as intensity, volume, and muscle time under tension). They found that in young men, a workout of lower intensity and more repetitions of resistance exercise, performed until muscular failure, was equally effective in stimulating muscle proteins as the conventional method. "These findings have important implications from a public health

standpoint because skeletal muscle mass is a large contributor to daily energy expenditure and it assists in weight management," says lead author Nicholas Burd. "Additionally, skeletal muscle mass, because of its size, is the primary site of blood sugar disposal and thus will likely play a role in reducing the risk for development of type 2 diabetes."

Herbal powerhouse

Oregano, the common pizza and pasta seasoning herb, has long been known to possess a variety of beneficial health effects, but preliminary data from a recent study by Long Island University researchers in New York has revealed its potential as an anti-cancer agent. Carvacrol, a constituent of oregano, has been shown to induce "cell suicide" in prostate cancer cells. The researchers are now trying to determine the signalling pathways that the compound uses to cause this suicide. "We know oregano has anti-bacterial as well as anti-inflammatory properties, but its effects on cancer cells really elevate the spice to the level of a super-spice like turmeric," says Dr Supriya Bavadekar of the pharmacology department.



Hit the spot

So it seems it's not a myth: the G-spot really does exist, and a study published last week in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* details the location and shape of this elusive structure. Dr Adam Ostrzenski of the Institute of Gynaecology in St Petersburg, Florida, found the G-spot, a "well-delineated sac structure", after conducting a layer-by-layer front vaginal wall dissection on an 83-year-old cadaver. He's even listed the exact co-ordinates of the spot – 16.5mm from the upper part of the urethral opening, creating a 35 degree angle with the side border of the urethra (the tube that carries urine out of the body). "This study confirmed the anatomic existence of the G-spot, which may lead to a better understanding and improvement of female sexual function," Ostrzenski concludes. But before you get too excited, Ostrzenski admits the G-spot may not be the same in every woman.

Suck it and see

Giving pacifiers to newborns is believed to interfere with breastfeeding, but a recent study shows that limiting its use in nurseries may actually increase infants' consumption of formula during the first few days in hospital. Researchers at Oregon Health & Science University analysed feeding data on 2,249 infants born in its hospital for about a year. Results showed that the rate of exclusive breastfeeding at the mother-baby unit decreased from 79 to 68 per cent after pacifiers were restricted, and the proportion of breastfed infants receiving supplemental formula increased from 18 to 28 per cent. The World Health Organisation recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. Medical centres that follow the WHO's "10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding" can be recognised as "baby-friendly hospitals" – and one step states that artificial teats or pacifiers should not be given to breastfeeding babies. The researchers say they hope their findings will stimulate discussion and scientific inquiry about whether there is sufficient evidence to support this universal recommendation.



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