

Fitness products galore at gadget show

January 13 2012, by Chris Lefkow



The BodyMedia Fit Core Armband is displayed at CES on January 8 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

If your New Year's resolution was to get more exercise and you're slipping already how about a digital personal trainer?

High-tech [fitness](#) and health products galore are on display at the [Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas, most of which can be linked to the Internet to allow users to track and analyze their progress in achieving their goals.

Some are high-performance devices aimed at dedicated athletes but most are designed to get the ordinary person off the couch and exercising.

Sally Edwards, founder and chief executive of Heart Zones, a fitness company that makes a [heart rate monitor](#), said about 10 percent of the US population does not need to be prodded to work out.

Eighty percent know it's good for them while the remaining 10 percent are just never going to get off the couch at all.

"This is about the 80 percent," said Jeff Holove, chief executive of Basis, a company which makes a multiple-sensor wristband that measures physical activity, heart rate, calories burned and [sleep patterns](#).

"This is about trying to help people live better," Holove said, providing consumers with "the experience, the product, the tool that will get them the results they're looking for.

"It's not about maximizing exercise or [sports performance](#)," he said.



People try out the VibaBody Slimmer exercise machine at CES in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 11.

According to the Consumer Electronics Association, the host of CES, the sports and fitness category in the United States is a \$70 billion annual business.

"This category is just exploding just now," said Holove, with companies and [health providers](#) beginning to show interest in sponsoring the devices.

"We're starting to see a lot of interest now from organizations that have a lot to gain from improving people's health and therefore lowering their health cost," Holove said.

One of the pioneers of the digital fitness device category is Finnish company Polar, which makes wearable performance sensors which range

in price from \$50 to \$450.

"We're about coaching," said Polar Electro Group product director Marco Suvilaakso. "Our products and solutions help people to achieve fitness and sports performance goals.

"We help people understand how to train in terms of intensity, when to train, when to go hard, when to back off," Suvilaaksohe said. "We keep them motivated by giving them the tools to share their training.

"We're the founder of this whole category," he said. "We started in the early 1980s. We were like a lone voice in the woods. So in a way it's really nice to see that the whole category's waking up."

Ivo Stivoric, chief technology officer of BodyMedia, which makes multi-sensor armbands designed to help improve weight loss, said bringing down the prices of the devices is a key to more widespread adoption.

"One of the things we're really working on as an industry and as a category is to reduce the price of these products," said Stivoric, whose company offers armbands ranging in price from \$149 to \$170.

Towards that goal, BodyMedia is coming out with a disposable patch that Stivoric said will be a "low cost trial mechanism for people to try out body monitoring."

David Wang, the chief executive of Striiv, is also offering a low cost path to better fitness, a \$99 device he describes as a "personal trainer in your pocket."

The Striiv, which has a color touchscreen and is smaller than a cellphone, counts the number of steps a person takes each day, rewarding them with points and setting challenges.

An enthusiastic health evangelist, Wang believes the digital revolution can truly lead to a healthier population.

"For the first time with consumer electronics you can change health, you can change people's lives," Wang said. "It's so awesome."

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