

## 'Digital health' movement in focus at tech show

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The 2013 Consumer Electronics Show includes a zone on fitness and health, pictured on January 9, 2012, with a variety of gadgets and services, including a heart monitoring app from Polar, a helmet cam for skiers from Geonaute, Fitbug's fitness monitor, and a game to help encourage exercise developed by United HealthCare.

With an app, a game or a gadget, technology startups and major companies across all sectors are trying to tackle some of the thorniest problems in health and medicine.

The [Consumer Electronics Show](#) is filled with [new gadgets](#) to monitor

fitness, detect problems and find solutions to health issues ranging from obesity to diabetes to rare medical conditions.

One trend is "gamification," which uses a model from the [video game industry](#) to offer points and rewards to boost health and reduce costs.

At CES, the world's biggest technology show, UnitedHealthcare unveiled a joint effort with Konami Digital Entertainment to reduce [childhood obesity](#) through a new dance game that challenges youngsters while monitoring things like [body mass index](#) and caloric burn rate.

The program "adds game mechanics and game psychology to make the experience more engaging and immersing," said Arianne Hoyland, game producer for the insurance giant.

Hoyland said the company has other programs such as using mobile apps to provide rewards to pregnant women to encourage prenatal visits. The women are given a gift certificate but if they receive the right care, "we can offset those costs and keep them healthier," she said.

"It turns out gamification of health really works," said James McQuivey, analyst at [Forrester Research](#).

"People have a competitive urge, and this can bring new people into something. People want peer recognition, they want to outdo other people."

James Fujimoto of the ANT+ Alliance, which includes some 350 firms that use low-power devices for fitness devices, including many wearable ones, said gamification has grown into a "very big initiative that is very popular for training.

Another gamification example comes from HealthyWage.com, which

partners with firms to offer a weight loss challenge for a group with a reward of \$10,000.

"This past year alone, we've seen a surge in businesses, healthcare companies and school districts seeking to offer weight loss programs that will better engage and excite the staff and, ultimately, more successfully achieve health and overriding fiscal program goals," HealthyWage CEO David Roddenberry said in a statement.

Other firms are finding ways to use [mobile apps](#) to improve health care.

The business software giant SAP has developed an app called "Care Circles" that allows a parent or other individual to manage health care with a multitude of specialists and others.

The program, which has not yet been publicly marketed but is available for free, was developed by an SAP employee to coordinate care among several specialists for a child with a rare medical condition.

"This gets around privacy concerns because the care is controlled by the guardian or individual," said Rishi Diwan, a product manager at SAP who showed the app to CES visitors.

Diwan said the app can help people with special needs, and that the company is working with the Alzheimer's Association and Breast Cancer Foundation to generate interest in the platform.

As of now, the app is not part of any effort to generate revenue but "we are thinking about ways to work on electronic medical records," he told AFP.

Other exhibitors at CES showed exercise arm bands and other gadgets to track factors such as heart rates, or real-time monitoring of blood sugar

for persons with diabetes. Another showed a digital fork that monitors caloric intake and vibrates if its user is eating too much too fast.

Some use low-power Bluetooth-connected patches to transmit data to a smartphone, a godsend for Bastian Hauck, a competitive sailor with type 1 diabetes who attended CES to promote the Continua Health Alliance for mobile wellness.

Hauck told AFP the Bluetooth patch he wears transmits to a smartphone and enables him to monitor glucose in real time, helping him determine the best eating and insulin intakes. He shares that information with other diabetics.

Treating diabetes, Hauck said, "is like a guessing game. You have to do it 24/7. There is no rest."

Although he could write down his readings, the wireless app "makes it easier" and provides extra motivation by being part of a community battling the same disease.

NFL quarterback Matt Hasselbeck showed CES a new skullcap from a company called MC10 that can fit under the helmet of a football player or other athlete and measure the impact of a collision, in an effort to better deal with concussions and similar injuries.

"In the NFL, you get hit in the head a lot," he said, adding that this is a major concern not only for professionals but for youth sports.

"This doesn't prevent a concussion but it's another set of eyes on the athlete," Hasselbeck added. "Our hope is that we can change the culture."

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