

# Appeal of well-being apps often short-lived according to Finnish study

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According to a doctoral thesis by Research Scientist Kirsikka Kaipainen from VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, online and mobile applications for stress management and healthy eating reach a large number of users but their appeal tends to be short-lived. Applications can contribute to improved well-being and provide support for behavioural changes as long as they are simple, attractive and easy to integrate into everyday life. However, the societal impact of the applications may remain small unless real-world implementation, maintenance and dissemination are planned from the very beginning of the development process.

Kaipainen's study examined the use and impact of different applications and proposed new design principles for applications aimed at improving [stress management](#) skills and promoting [healthy eating](#). Based on the findings, freely available applications can reach a large number of users, but their appeal is often short-lived.

Six studies on online and mobile applications for stress management and healthy eating were conducted with diverse settings and target groups. Two of the studies assessed the use of online and mobile applications for healthy eating and found that less than 10 per cent of the almost 200,000 users they attracted remained active.

Based on the findings, applications for stress management and healthy eating can help users to change their lifestyles, but the development process is in need of refinement. In order to make an impact on public

health, both end users and professionals need to be involved in the development of well-being applications, business potential needs to be taken into account from the start, and the applications should be based on theory. Personal feedback and support from a professional continue to be important for users. The design of the applications should be clear and user-friendly, support small daily actions that result in immediate benefits, emphasise self-improvement and reflection, and offer guidance while maintaining freedom of choice.

"For individual users, the applications should aim to become redundant once the users have learned enough skills and gained self-knowledge. For society as a whole, these applications could be incorporated into education and healthcare systems and used to complement professionals' work," says Research Scientist Kirsikka Kaipainen from VTT.

There are currently at least 100,000 mobile applications around the world aimed at promoting health and well-being, of which about one in six are designed for professionals. The number of [users](#) worldwide is estimated to grow to 1.7 billion by 2017.

At worst, long-term stress and unhealthy eating habits can lead to mental health problems and contribute to cardiovascular diseases. These are serious problems: Depression is currently the leading cause of disability in the world, and coronary heart disease the leading cause of death. Online and [mobile applications](#) offer a partial solution to scalable promotion of healthy lifestyles, as almost everyone has easy access to them nowadays. Well-being [applications](#) can be used independently or to support professional interventions.

**More information:** The thesis is available online at [www.vtt.fi/inf/pdf/science/2014/S55.pdf](http://www.vtt.fi/inf/pdf/science/2014/S55.pdf).

Provided by VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland

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