

Review: New kiddie fitness band more toy than tech

May 28 2014, by Bree Fowler



This product image provided by LeapFrog shows the LeapBand. (AP Photo/LeapFrog)

Wearable technology is all the rage these days for adults. Now, the concept is spreading to kids.

LeapFrog, the maker of [kids'](#) tablets and other educational products, recently unveiled the LeapBand, a device worn around the wrist. It's really more of a toy, designed for kids ages 4 to 7, rather than a true fitness tracker. Yet it does offer some of the same features in a kid-friendly way.

And in light of concerns about kids getting too much screen time, some parents may see the new product as a way to satisfy technological cravings while keeping kids active.

The LeapBand doesn't go on sale until August, but I've had a chance to try one out in recent weeks. It will retail for \$40 and come in blue, green or pink.

The LeapBand doesn't have a GPS receiver, a touch screen or any sensors to tell exactly how much your child is moving. But a little energy bar that encircles the band's small color screen does keep track of how many activity challenges your child cues up.

In that mode, the band will ask your child to do tasks such as "leap like a frog" or "swim like a fish with a wish." For each challenge, the child earns points and the energy bar charting their progress extends a little bit more.

Once the devices launch, parents will be able to sync the bands with software on the company's website or a smartphone app and track their child's activities. Those features weren't ready when I tested it.

I was surprised how eager my 4-year-old daughter was to follow the instructions the LeapBand gave her. She's an active kid to start with, but

it was fun to see her bounce around the room when the device told her to.

Integrated into the device are a variety of virtual pets that your child can exercise along with, as well as feed and bathe. Remember those Tamagotchi toys from the 1990s? It's the same idea.

Points earned from activity challenges unlock new pets, as well as treats and toys for them.

There are several different pets and customization options, so little kids may need help setting this up.

My daughter selected a cat, customized the color of its fur, chose a name and then danced along as it moved across the screen. But she also got sucked in by some of the band's more sedate games, particularly one where you use the device's arrow keys to catch falling food items in your pet's feeding dish.

The first day she had it, she wouldn't take the LeapBand off. But as with a lot of other toys she's received, it was pushed aside in favor of something else by the second day.

Like many LeapFrog products, the LeapBand is designed to withstand the everyday tortures inflicted by [small children](#). While a bit bulky, its hard, plastic shell is durable and water resistant.

The reality is, most small children aren't going to wear or use this kind of device on a regular basis the way an adult would with a traditional fitness tracker. And unlike adults who buy fitness trackers, most kids aren't focused on losing weight or staying active.

In addition, the LeapBand's games and activity challenges just aren't

engaging enough to monopolize a small child's limited attention span for very long.

The website will eventually have additional games that parents can download, giving kids more variety. But it's still tough to draw [young kids](#) for long.

Yet if a product like this gets some kids that normally would curl up on the couch with a tablet to instead get on their feet and bounce around, then maybe it's not a bad thing after all.

More information: www.leapfrog.com/en-us/products/leapband

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