

Tech review: Garmin Vivofit fitness band aims to keep you moving

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Garmin Vivofit

If you've been to a gym lately, you've probably noticed how popular fitness trackers have become.

I reviewed the Nike FuelBand when it came out and liked it, but I wasn't sure I saw enough there to recommend daily wear.

Lately I've been wearing the new Garmin Vivofit (\$129.99, garmin.com), and I really am starting to see the appeal of wearing something on my wrist to help me get fit. Or maybe I've just come to care more about monitoring my fitness in the last two years.

Its no secret that I'm a big guy. Somewhere on this page I'm sure you can find a picture of me. I need to lose weight.

I've been stepping up my exercise, eating better and logging my food and exercise into an iPhone app called Lose It!

Since I'm already in a "let's get fit" state of mind, I was happy to get the chance to review the Vivofit.

WHAT IT IS

The Vivofit is a small fitness tracker that snaps into rubber wristbands. The tracker is about 2 inches long and half an inch wide.

At its core, the Vivofit is a pedometer you wear on your wrist.

Its display is a simple gold and red LCD that's always on.

Unlike other trackers I've tried, the Vivofit doesn't need to be charged every few days. It has two replaceable batteries inside that will last about a year.

To change the batteries, you have to remove four tiny screws. This battery security means the Vivofit is completely waterproof. I've taken it in the pool and shower on many occasions this summer. No worries.

The LCD screen shows one thing at a time. You can scroll through the Vivofit's seven views by repeatedly pressing its single button.

The display will keep showing whatever reading you decide to leave up.

The Vivofit's information screens show time, date, heart rate (optional), number of steps you've taken since midnight, your step goal for the day (this number decreases the more you walk), miles walked and calories burned.

The Vivofit comes with two black rubber wristbands - for small or large wrists. Colored bands are also available.

Changing the band takes all of 10 seconds.

The clasp is a simple one with oval holes and small metal posts. The clasp was easy to engage and adjust with one hand and mostly stayed in place, although it did fall off once when I was moving boxes and the edge of a box caught on the strap.

The Vivofit has Bluetooth LE to sync with a free app on your newer smartphone or tablet, and it comes with a small USB dongle to sync it with your Mac or Windows computer.

There is an option to buy the Vivofit with a heart rate monitoring strap (\$169.99 for the bundle) you wear around your chest. The Vivofit also works with third-party straps if they have the ANT+ logo on them.

By the way, there is no alarm function on the Vivofit. No beeps, no vibrations.

HOW IT WORKS

The Vivofit is all about the steps.

It starts you off with a goal of 5,000 steps per day.

If you make the goal, it will increase the goal for the next day by a few hundred steps. If you don't make the goal, tomorrow's goal will decrease by a few hundred steps.

You can go into the Garmin Connect software and manually set the goal to fit your workout.

The Vivofit is also about motivating you to get up and move.

On the top of the display a red bar will appear if you've been sedentary for an hour. The red bar gets a bit longer every 15 minutes until it reaches all the way across the display.

Think of it as a "nag" bar. To get rid of it, just get up and move for a few minutes.

I got to where I really did hate to see that bar and would make it a point to take a walk often enough to keep it at bay.

One of the biggest advantages is the ability to see the live data from a heart rate strap. It's one thing to keep up with distance, but if you're on a stationary bike or doing any other activity that doesn't involve swinging your arms to activate the pedometer, you'll be happy to be able to monitor your heart rate.

By the way, most water aerobics don't register on the Vivofit.

Another interesting feature is the live view of calories burned during the day.

The number is a combination of calories you burn during activity plus the number of calories you burn just going about your life.

This number is good to know if you're trying to lose weight or maintain a weight loss.

Think of it as the number of calories you can eat each day and maintain your weight.

If you track your calories burned and log the food you take in, you're able to see whether you're eating too many or too few calories each day.

The Vivofit can also track your sleep.

You hold down the button on the tracker for a few seconds and you'll see the word sleep appear. This tells the Vivofit you're going to sleep. It will stay in sleep mode until you press the button again in the morning.

When you sync your data, sleep information will be viewable in the form of a graph showing when the Vivofit moved during the night.

This isn't exactly useful to me, but it's there if you want to try it.

CONCLUSIONS

I like the Vivofit.

It provides accurate, clear information on my smartphone and on my computer.

The heart rate strap fills in the gaps for exercises that don't trigger the pedometer.

The reports that you can run on the computer bring up graphs and data you can use to keep close track of your fitness progress.

I think I'm starting to see the appeal of a smart watch, more for the fitness features than just telling time.

If the Vivofit were able to show me my text messages, upcoming appointments or the caller ID of my smartphone, I could be a smart watch convert.

Until then, I'm happy with the Vivofit's existing features and can't wait to see where this market is headed.

Pros: One-year battery life. Waterproof. Optional [heart rate](#) monitor.

Cons: No alarm. Doesn't register motion if your arms aren't moving.

Bottom line: One of the better fitness bands I've tried.

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