

Consumer tech show spotlights gadgets for healthy living

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The InBody activity tracker and body fat sensor is displayed January 7, 2015 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas Nevada

From bracelets that measure body fat to robots that coach children through chemotherapy, the Consumer Electronics Show brimmed with gadgets promising prescriptions for healthier lives.

Innovations on display by companies such as California-based Neurosky and Melomind of Paris involved measuring brain activity for reducing stress.

"There are more wearable health gadgets here than ever before," NPD analyst Stephen Baker told AFP.

"That is one of the top two or three categories that people are interested in; there are lots of small companies trying to find their way into an exploding market."

While the show floor was awash in stylish wrist wear for measuring activity, sleep, and even mood, an InBody band went so far as to measure how much of a wearer's body is made up of fat.

"We have tons of interest," Brian Galman of InBody said of the bands, which will be priced at \$180 when they hit the market in March.

InBody is building on success it has had with scales that give detailed analysis of [body composition](#) by sending mild electric charges through people from the bottoms of their feet to their thumbs pressed against contact points on handles.

Galman said the scales are used by professional sports teams, medical facilities; the US military; high-end fitness centers, and even the gym at the main Google campus.

Brains and backs

A headset shown off by California-based Neurosky captured signals emitted by firing neurons and then equated various frequencies to states of mind such as how hard one is thinking or how much they appreciate something.

Neurosky technology has been built into wearable devices to measure conditions such as fatigue or stress, according to products on display.

Valedo Therapy was at CES with what it billed as the first digital back coach. Sensors on the chest and back feed signals to newer model iPhones or iPads, and are synched to video games designed to make exercise therapy fun.



A MEDi robot on display at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada, January 5, 2015

"There is a medical layer and a gaming layer," Robert MacKenzie of Valedo told AFP.

"This is actually a medical product for exercise therapy."

The Switzerland-based company sells the recently-launched back health kit for \$359 online at valedotherapy.com.

RxRobots of Canada was at CES with small, humanoid MEDi robots designed to befriend children in medical settings and reduce pain or fear associated with treatments ranging from vaccinations to chemo-therapy.

Software brains in MEDi robots were crafted with the help of a child psychologist and include voice and face recognition features so the friendly robots can recognize children, according to RxRobots medical advisor Gerald Bushman, an anesthesiologist at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles.

"MEDi is meant not only to distract a child, but to teach him or her coping mechanisms that give them some mastery of their environment," Bushman told AFP

MEDi has had success in [medical facilities](#) in Canada, where the company is based, and is out to debut in US hospitals this year.

An array of smart health gadgets that France-based Visiomed showed off included ThermoFlash contact-free thermometer being used by the World Health Organization, NATO and others in the battle against Ebola.

Visiomed marked the start of CES this week by making a home version of ThermoFlash available in the US at a price of \$60. The thermometer, which measures body temperature by being pointed at a person's temple, synchs to smartphone applications that coach users in what steps to take and what to tell health care providers in emergencies.

Elsewhere on the show floor were a baby pacifier that doubled as thermometer, and TempTraq patches that stick to sick babies like adhesive bandages to monitor body temperature. Both devices sent updates to parents' smartphones or tablets.



Pedro Vecchi of Neurosky models a brain wave sensing headset that can be used to optimize brain health, education, alertness and overall function at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas January 6, 2015

Novelty into need

"What's really exciting is what connected health brings to people in terms of prevention and diminishing their risks," Visiomed medical

director Francois Teboul told AFP

Wristbands or other devices that measure sleep, steps, laps swum, miles run or other activities tend to be abandoned after the novelty wears off, according to market trackers.

To endure, gadgets need to provide [health care providers](#) and perhaps even medical insurance companies with personalized information that can lead to faster, smarter treatments and perhaps even discounts on policies, analysts maintained.

"Knowing temperature, steps, or how well you slept is the easy part," said Forrester analyst Frank Gillett.

"How do you inject all that technology into a health care system that is reactive instead of proactive to predict problems and treat them early?"

Neurosky's Vecchi gazed across an health gadget section of the CES show floor and agreed that the trend was heading straight for the medical and pharmaceutical industries.

"The wearable has a much greater value in the hands of those people than in the hands of consumers who are just measuring their steps," Vecchi said.

"In the hands of a doctor or a medical institution that kind of data has tremendous value; they can monitor trends and put it in the context of your medical records."

The bottom line is that people are thinking about tracking health and fitness and that is a good thing, NPD analyst Baker concluded.

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