

Does anyone use health apps?

WASHINGTON, USA: US consumers are being offered a cornucopia of smartphone apps to track or manage health but only a small number of people are using them, according to a survey released recently.

The Pew Research Centre's study found that only about seven percent of people surveyed used a smartphone app to track a health indicator like weight, diet, exercise or to monitor a chronic disease such as diabetes.

"There's still a low uptake in terms of apps and technology," said lead researcher Susannah Fox. "It is surprising. We've been looking at health apps since 2010 and health app uptake has been essentially flat for three years."

The research suggests that consumers are slow to latch on to smartphone technology for health even in a market with hundreds of new apps to manage weight and track blood pressure, pregnancy, blood sugar, diabetes or medication.

"There's a proliferation of choices, and consumers are being faced with a many options," Fox told *AFP*. "What we see is that consumers are losing interest in these apps," she added.

Fox said her research and other studies have shown that systematic tracking for health issues is helpful.

"People say that tracking as an activity is having an impact," she said. "But I can't make a judgment on whether it's better to use paper and pencil or an app." The researchers found that 19% of smartphone owners have downloaded an app related to health, although these were not necessarily used for monitoring a specific health issue.

Exercise, diet and weight are the most popular types of health apps downloaded, the study found. Some 38% of health app users track their exercise, 31% monitor their diet and 12% use an app to manage their weight.

Around one in seven adults surveyed track a health indicator like weight, diet or exercise for themselves or another person. Roughly half of those tracking their health or symptoms said they keep track of progress "in their heads," while 21% use some form of technology, which ranges from spreadsheets to medical devices or apps.

The study found that a third of all "trackers" share their data with someone else, most often a medical professional. The survey found that a "notable number" of trackers monitoring chronic conditions said they do not keep formal records.

Some 37% of people with two or more conditions said they memorise progress notes, as do 48% of those who are monitoring a single health issue.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge