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Many popular nutrition apps lack behavior change content features

Most nutrition apps effectively track dietary intake, anthropometrics, and physical activity but lack behavior change features according to a new study in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior

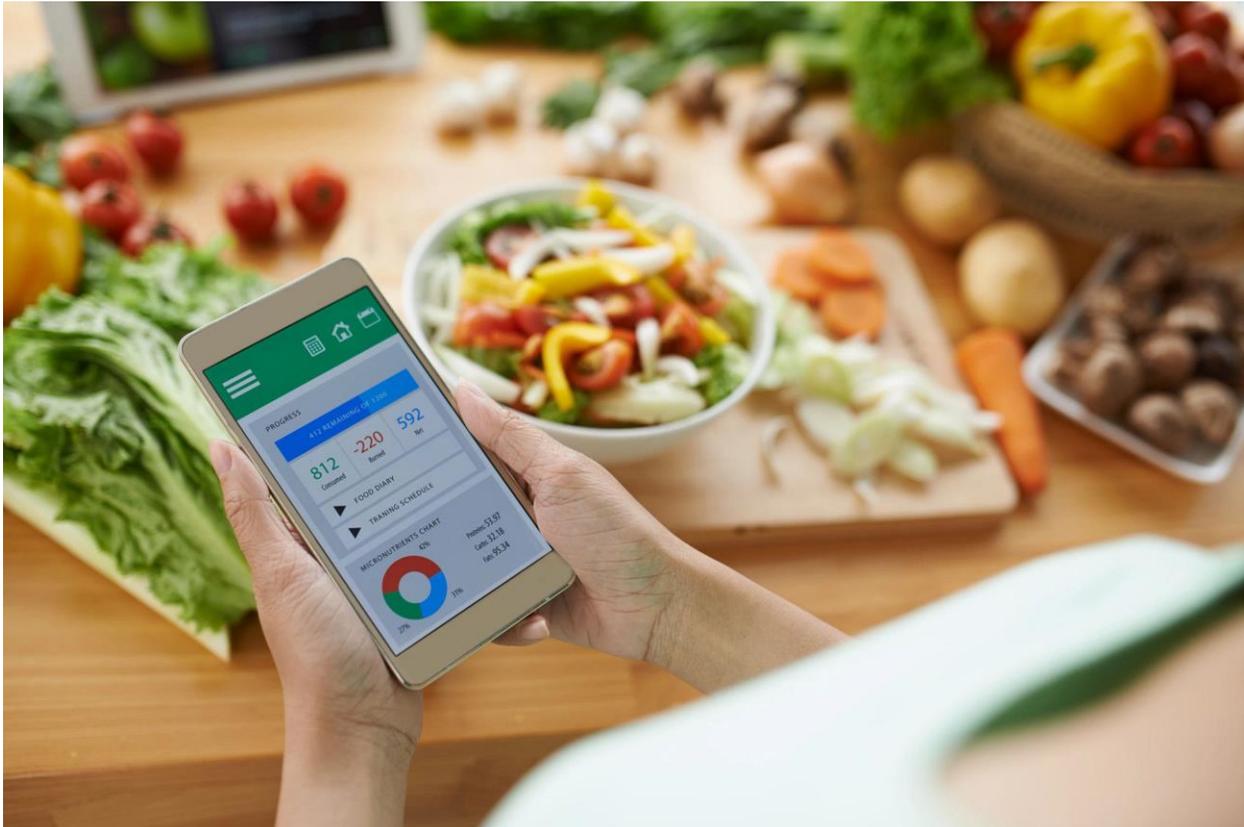
Philadelphia, September 8, 2021 – Many consumers seek technology to support weight management efforts. Fortunately, there are many free and paid versions of nutrition smartphone apps that possess an abundance of features dedicated to dietary intake, anthropometrics, and physical activity. Unfortunately, they are notably devoid of content features dedicated to behavior change according to a [new study](#) in the [Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior](#), published by Elsevier.

“This paper is part of a larger project that takes a closer look at the utility of diet and nutrition smartphone applications, or apps. We examine their ability to serve as behavior change support systems for addressing weight management, specifically with the hopes of determining to what extent they’re suitable for supporting aspects of the nutrition care process in dietetic practice,” said Telema Briggs, BS, Department of Nutritional Sciences, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA.

This study analyzed top-performing diet and nutrition apps and provides an overview of the available features and capabilities that those apps possess. Further, it compares what is offered in free versions of apps versus what they provide in their upgraded, premium versions. Reviewers assessed free and upgraded versions of 15 nutrition apps for features within four categories: dietary intake, anthropometric tracking, physical activity, and behavior change or motivational interviewing.

“The study was designed to answer three questions. What type of features is typically present in popular diet and nutrition apps? Two, how does the feature availability change once these apps are upgraded to their premium versions? And three, are there any associations between feature inclusion in how well an

app performs in the platform marketplace using app metadata such as ratings, editor's choice designations, and the number of installations.”



Caption: Most nutrition apps effectively track dietary intake, anthropometrics, and physical activity but lack behavior change features according to a new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (Credit: iStock.com/DragonImages).

This study contributes to the growing body of literature that describes the capabilities of nutrition apps. Findings from this study suggested that the inclusion of behavior change features did not seem to be a significant factor in influencing average app ratings, cost, or the number of installations. Of the hypothesized associations between metadata and the overall total number of app features, only app subscription cost was found to be positively correlated with the number of features.

“The heterogeneity of these apps is probably one of the most fascinating things we've uncovered in this project. They all essentially help guide users to issues that are related to weight management, but in slightly different ways. So, we have some apps that are more focused on behavior change, others on dietary intake and physical activity. Some do a great job connecting nutrient intake with risk for disease, while others are great at helping decision-making processes when shopping for groceries or ordering food at restaurants. And so, the good news is that there's really something for everybody,” Briggs said.

Notes for editors

The article is “Feature Availability Comparison in Free and Paid Versions of Popular Smartphone Weight Management Applications,” by Telema Briggs, BS; Virginia Quick, PhD, RD; and William K. Hallman, PhD

(<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2021.05.010>). It appears in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, volume 53, issue 9 (September 2021), published by [Elsevier](#).

It is openly available at [https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046\(21\)00667-9/fulltext](https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(21)00667-9/fulltext).

Full text of the article is also available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Eileen Leahy at +1 732 238 3628 or jnebmedia@elsevier.com to obtain a copy. To schedule an interview with the author(s), please contact Telema Briggs, BS, at telema.briggs@rutgers.edu.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Telema Briggs, BS, and other information for journalists are available at www.jneb.org/content/media. Excerpts from the podcast may be reproduced by the media with permission from Eileen Leahy.

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The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (JNEB), the official journal of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB), is a refereed, scientific periodical that serves as a resource for all professionals with an interest in nutrition education and dietary/physical activity behaviors. The purpose of JNEB is to document and disseminate original research, emerging issues, and practices relevant to nutrition education and behavior worldwide and to promote healthy, sustainable food choices. It supports the society's efforts to disseminate innovative nutrition education strategies, and communicate information on food, nutrition, and health issues to students, professionals, policymakers, targeted audiences, and the public.

The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* features articles that provide new insights and useful findings related to nutrition education research, practice, and policy. The content areas of JNEB reflect the diverse interests of health, nutrition, education, Cooperative Extension, and other professionals working in areas related to nutrition education and behavior. As the Society's official journal, JNEB also includes occasional policy statements, issue perspectives, and member communications. www.jneb.org

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