

How an electronic monitor shocked me into a healthy lifestyle

When Chrissie Russell strapped the device to her arm, it was a bleeping wake-up call ...

SHARE | PRINT | EMAIL | TEXT SIZE

By Chrissie Russell
Thursday December 03 2009

I've always been something of a delusional dieter. I know about low GI, Atkins and food combining and yet all this learning and expertise has never fully converted itself into the weight loss I always hoped for.

The reason, which has become abundantly clear in the past fortnight, is that I have largely been kidding myself. All the little snacks that didn't count, the shared desserts that I ate most of but told myself I'd only had a spoonful, and the philosophy that walking to the shop negated the calorific impact of the sticky toffee pudding bought there -- well, they've all come back to haunt me.

My dieting epiphany has been brought on by a short sharp burst of electronic shock therapy. For the past two weeks I have been hooked up to a device that tells me, in glaring black and white, exactly where and how many of my consumed calories are being worked off and how many are being left to set up base around my expanding middle.

I've always thought of myself as being a predominantly healthy eater who enjoys moderate exercise. A few things may pass my lips that aren't part and parcel of my five-a-day but the reality of my dieting efforts is the hardest thing I've ever had to swallow.

The KiFit is a lifestyle management system. An armband, strapped to my left tricep, uses sensors to measure motion and changes in body temperature to analyse the level of exercise going on.

This information is relayed to a small display meter clipped onto my belt. A glance at the display and I can see how many calories I've used, how many steps I've taken, and all this is measured against my personal targets for the day.

The way it works is that the targets are set from data I upload onto an online activity manager. By logging details such as my height and weight, my ideal weight and even what time I go to bed at, the Kifit is able to work out just what I need to do to get me there. It feels like a cross between having a personal trainer, a fancy pedometer and a data analyst all rolled into one.

My targets tell me that to burn one-and-a-half pounds a week and get to my goal weight by the end of January, I'll have to burn 2,550 calories a day, by taking 5,000 steps and at least half an hour of exercise.

I'm impressed by the clever science and accessibility of the device; it's when I come to putting it into practice that things get difficult. My failure to meet my targets was catastrophic.

A day spent sitting at my desk working on a computer, something I do most days for around eight hours, only burned off a paltry 1.3 calories per minute -- worryingly only slightly more than I work off when asleep.

In total my average working day, even with a short walk, only logged 1,889 calories. Shocked by the shortfall between this and my target of 2,550 calorie expenditure I start taking long walks -- but still only notch up 2,177 calories.

For a monthly subscription I can upload the data from my armband onto my online account manager and check my woeful progress report that graphically illustrates the shortcomings of my actual calorie usage against my targets.

There's also a facility to log meals and chart nutritional balance and, because the armband is worn 24 hours a day, the device also reports on my sleep efficiency, which, probably through the stress of not meeting my calorie targets, is also grimly inefficient.

I discover my nutritional balance is way off kilter. The pie chart dictating my ideal daily balance suggests 27pc protein, 50pc carbohydrate and allows 5pc for alcohol and 18pc for fat. My fat quota is often more than double what it ought to be.

Despondency ensued, but for once my gloomy mood didn't have me reaching for the [Ben & Jerry's](#) -- I can't face logging 'ice cream, one tub' and having to deal with being mocked with a grossly outweighed bar chart of calories lost/calories consumed. Instead I go for a walk. I also start swimming again and force myself to really think about what I eat.

Even with improvements, I only manage to hit my target calorie usage twice in 14 days, so I fell somewhat short of my hoped for 1.5 pounds a week. But using the device hammers home the fact that there is no quick fix when it comes to losing weight.

The science is simple: to shift the pounds you have to work off more than you eat, but if you really want to shift the weight you have to get off your butt and exercise.

The days I hit my targets -- and what a joyous sound that bleeping alert was to my ears -- were days when I'd done more than three hours of exercise. This might sound overwhelming but it took a two-hour walk and an hour of vigorous housework to get me up to my goal.

The progress reports have given me long-term focus and being able to put an exact number on my calorie usage has been extremely motivating. It's made me realise that every little thing does count, like walking when I'm on taking a phone call, doing lunges when I'm waiting for the kettle to boil, and being much more conscious (and honest) about my food choices.

After years trying to cheat myself, slim KiFit has been the shock I needed to hopefully change my habits permanently and get me pacing the right route to healthy weight loss.

The Irish Nutrition and [Dietetic Institute](#) agrees that KiFit can be a helpful tool with setting goals and giving people a realistic insight into what might be amiss in their exercise routine.

"Self-monitoring of activity is a great way to show people how little or how much they do and this tool looks like a good way to encourage exercise and improve overall activity levels," says nutritionist [Aveen Bannon](#).

"I often discourage people from just counting calories burned during an exercise session because exercise results in a higher usage of calories over the next 24 hours, not just the time of exercise but this tool takes account for that."

However, she adds: "A drawback about it is that it does appear to be quite calorie-focused and although we want people's energy expenditure to be greater than their energy input for weight loss, it's not that black and white. Balanced nutrition is very important and where the calories come from.

"I sometimes find that people can get a little too focused on counting calories and dieting can become a preoccupation. Therefore I'd suggest people pay as much, if not more, attention to what the device reveals about their nutritional balance and not just looking at the ratio of calories used and lost."

KiFit won't appeal to everyone; some might find it a bit labour intensive, although it's up to the individual whether they choose to log meals and waist measurements. But if, like me, you've been prone to taking the easy route on diets in the past, then putting in a bit of honest hard work could be worth its weight in gold.

Kifit is available from www.kifit.co.uk for €110.17 plus subscription

- Chrissie Russell

Irish Independent



Chrissie Russell works while wearing her KiFit monitor. Picture by Ronan Lang

Also In Health & Fitness

- ▶ [Cheating's OK if you achieve your goal](#)
- ▶ [Comfort eating 'does work'](#)
- ▶ [How to turn back the clock 20 years](#)
- ▶ [Shape Up: Have your cake and eat it too](#)
- ▶ [Popcorn and soda equal to three quarter pounders, study finds](#)

◀ [Health & Fitness Home](#)