



A Patient's Guide to Healthcare Apps

By Trudie Mitschang

HEALTH-RELATED MOBILE apps are rapidly becoming mainstays for tracking, managing and maintaining health. For the chronically ill, technology can offer practical and moral support, and facilitate everything from interacting with physicians and filling prescriptions to monitoring symptoms and tracking medication side effects. Even better, many of these apps are completely free (or available for a nominal fee) to download on a smart phone or tablet, and most are very easy to use, even for the not-too-tech-savvy.

Practical Help to Make Life Easier

When it comes to self-managing chronic illness, data collection is usually one of the first things to master. Collecting data about symptoms, reactions and overall health is time-consuming and monotonous, and for those suffering from brain fog (common among the chronically ill), it could be that much more challenging. That's where a monitoring app can really help. Depending on the app, things like sleep habits, food consumption and reactions, medication usage, activities and vitals signs can be tracked. These apps even log the data and may send information directly to a patient's physician. Some apps will track vitals manually or through the use of wearable sensors, and reminders such as for taking prescribed medications can be set up.

Spoon Tracking

Many patients with invisible chronic illness identify themselves as "spoonies," a reference to the Spoon Theory analogy touted by *But You Don't Look Sick* founder Christine Miserandino. According to the theory, spoons are a visual reference to the amount of energy an individual has to expend on any given day; when the spoons run out, the person is spent. To better assess what activities seem to zap energy reserves, patients can consider a tracker app that helps index overall activity for designated periods of time. They can then use the index to see which physical, emotional and mental activities consistently leave them feeling drained. Keeping records like this over a period of time can help to make informed lifestyle choices that will positively impact both health and spoon count.

Goal-Setting and Motivation

Every year, millions of people set goals to exercise more and eat healthier. Somewhere into the first few weeks, reality tends



to sink in and that initial push to succeed is lost. While few can afford the motivation that comes from working with a personal trainer or chef, thanks to mobile technology, downloadable apps offer ongoing support, goal tracking, meal plans, grocery lists and customizable workouts. Having daily reminders that prompt people to take a walk, drink more water or set aside 15 minutes to pursue a personal goal may be just the push they need to achieve short- and long-term aspirations.

Feeling Empowered

Patients living with chronic illness may feel very dependent on their healthcare team and caregivers. One of the significant benefits of today's mobile healthcare apps is that they can put a measure of control back into the hands of patients. By becoming more aware of various symptoms, triggers, medication reactions and vital signs, patients will feel much more empowered, knowledgeable and prepared for regularly scheduled physician appointments.

Whether already technologically savvy or relatively new to the app world, patients are managing health and monitoring illness with phone, tablet and computer-based apps that become welcome and even indispensable members of an ongoing healthcare team. ■

TRUDIE MITSCHANG is a contributing writer for *IG Living* magazine.



Apps Worth Accessing



My Pain Diary

My Pain Diary tracks chronic pain, symptoms, triggers and more to create detailed reports for doctors. Available for iOS and Android.
\$4.99



Symple

Symple allows patients to monitor the ebb and flow of symptoms over long periods of time. It is designed by both patients and doctors. Available for iOS and Android.
Free, with in-app upgrades



TracknShare

TracknShare is a series of apps allowing patients to track everything from bowel movements, habits, autism health needs, mindfulness and happiness. Available for iOS and Android.
Free



Flaredown

Flaredown is a comprehensive symptom tracker for autoimmune and invisible illnesses. It is built by patients, for patients. Available for iOS and Android.
Free



ME/CFS Diary Pro

This app monitors not only symptoms but also activities. It's designed to help patients manage activities and fatigue by tracking things such as sleep, diet, activity pacing and immune system support. Available for iOS and Android.
Available for seven-day free trial



Shift Wheel

Shift Wheel lets patients see their whole self. Each day, they can create their own colorful life wheel that shows a view of life balance. The app tracks eight key life attributes: body, mind, soul, love, work, nature, gratitude and community. Available for iOS.
Free with \$1.99 in-app upgrades



Chronic Illness Assistant

The Chronic Illness Assistant is a website and mobile app that offers comprehensive support for the management of chronic illness. Available for iOS and Android.
Free



CareZone

CareZone makes it easy to document symptoms, keep track of appointments and organize contacts for doctors, insurance, pharmacies and more. It will send reminders to take medications or refill them. A journal is included to document day-to-day symptoms, record doctor instructions and even privately share updates with family members. Available for iOS and Android.
Free



GI Buddy

This app gives patients all the prompting and data needed to effectively manage GI conditions with healthcare providers. It has features to help track symptoms, treatment plans and diet, and it emails all the information needed for a constructive visit with the doctor. Available for iOS and Android.
Free



My Medical Info

My Medical Info lets patients easily organize all health information in one place, where they can view it, update it and share it with doctors. Available for iOS and Android.
99 cents



Pillboxie

Pillboxie allows patients to “visually” manage meds. Scheduling a reminder is as easy as dropping a pill into a pillbox. It is designed and developed by a registered nurse. Available for iOS and Android.
\$1.99



My Action Planner

My Action Planner is a mobile implementation of the popular Action Plan of Stanford University School of Medicine’s Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. This goal-setting tool can help patients make changes to live a healthier and happier life. Available for iOS and Android.
99 cents