

## WIRED TO WORRY

# Left To My Own Devices



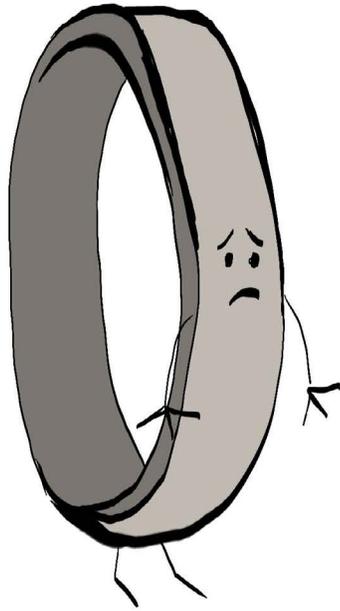
Christine  
Korol

I love gadgets. I also love tracking data. You would think that I would be over the moon about all the cool personal fitness trackers on the market. Surprisingly, I am underwhelmed and I have spent some time reflecting on my lack of unreserved enthusiasm.

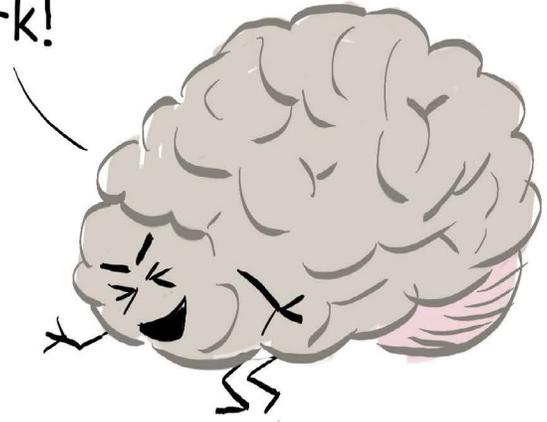
As a cognitive behavioural therapist, I frequently ask my clients to track their sleep, exercise, caffeine, thoughts, mood, diet and more. Even though research shows that tracking improves outcomes, it is still a hassle and compliance is often an issue. Letting clients know that some data is better than no data does help, but an easier way to collect that information would be a relief.

That brings us to the early adopters in the Quantified Self Movement who have started to develop some impressive technical solutions to the collection of behavioural data. If you are not already familiar with the term, Quantified Self refers to using technology (often using wearable sensors) to track behavioural data. Some examples of the devices that are making their way into the mainstream are Nike's Fuelband, the Fitbit, and the Jawbone UP. These devices make data collection easy and can track sleep, steps taken, and even stairs climbed (in models that have an altimeter).

So, what's my problem? I have decided that it boils down to the fact that



Let me see if I got this!  
 YOU expect that because  
 you tell people they haven't  
 exercised enough that they  
 will go and exercise more????  
 Ya..that'll work!



many people see these devices as a solution to their motivation problems when, in fact, they simply assist you in tracking your progress. Activity trackers might simplify life for avid exercisers already tracking their progress with more complex systems. However, for someone who is ambivalent or precontemplative about making healthy behavioural changes, buying a personal activity monitor is unlikely to be enough to achieve their personal health goals. At the end of the day, that

Fitbit or Fuelband doesn't make the workout less painful or force you to keep running when you feel like packing it in.

The technology is wonderful and I look forward to future quantified self developments. The danger in misunderstanding that data alone does not equal behavioural change is the discouragement and mistaken belief that the individual has failed. As therapists, we can mitigate some of this damage by teaching our clients some

of the many strategies that increase motivation, encourage persistence and help us cope with the inevitable failures on the road to better health.

---

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR:**

*Christine Korol, Ph.D. is a cartoonist, psychologist in private practice in Calgary, Canada and the host/producer of a podcast on [WiredToWorry.com](http://WiredToWorry.com) that provides free online anxiety and stress reduction education videos.*