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An Apple A Day

What does Apple do with your health and
fitness data?

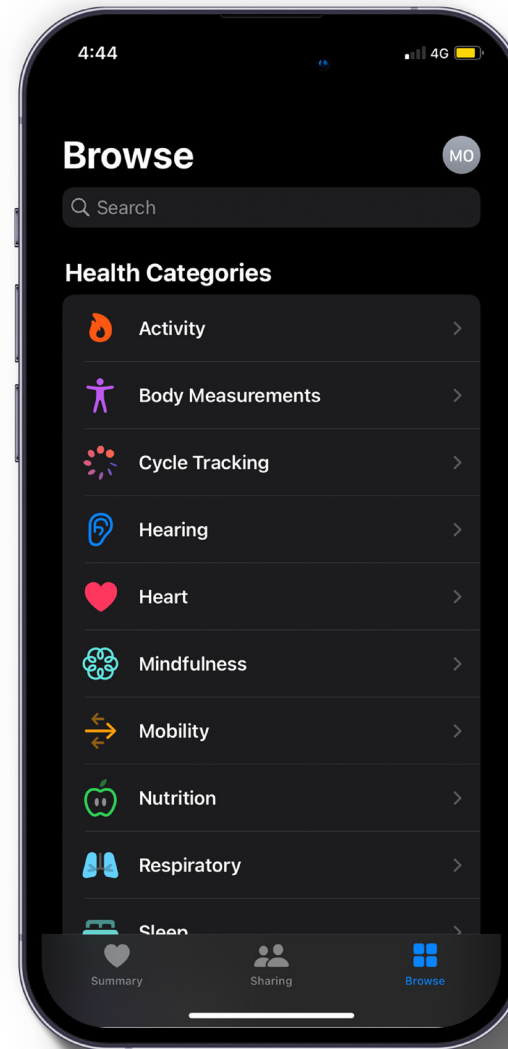


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Since being introduced in 2014 with Apple's iOS 8, HealthKit, also known as the Health app, has tracked and collected the health and fitness data of its users through their iPhones, Apple Watches, and compatible third-party apps. This aims to give users greater control over their health and wellbeing, while storing all their information securely and in one place.

The Health app collects the health data from almost every aspect of its users' lives. When the app is first opened, they build a profile, determining their age, sex, height, and weight. They are also given the choice to set up their Medical ID, which provides basic medical information, such as age, allergies, medications, and emergency contacts, which can be accessible from the lock screen by first responders and paramedics. The app then tracks and organises other health information, from their step count and sleep schedule, to their blood oxygen levels and the medications they take. The data is organised into 14 Health



categories, which can be accessed from the Browse tab; Activity, Body Measurements, Cycle Tracking, Hearing, Heart, Medications, Mindfulness, Mobility, Nutrition, Respiratory, Sleep, Symptoms, Vitals, and Other Data. There is also a section to add Clinical Documents, where users can add documents provided to them by their healthcare providers.

The Health and Fitness apps help remove the barriers associated with health access by allowing users to share their data with health and medical organisations. Users also have the chance to share their health data with friends, family, and third-party apps. Jeff Williams, Apple's chief operating officer, said "We believe passionately that technology can play a role in improving health outcomes and encouraging people to live a healthier day, and we are excited about the many ways users are benefiting from our health and fitness features" (Apple, 2022). This raises a big concern around privacy and data security. Apple claims that the collected health data is encrypted and

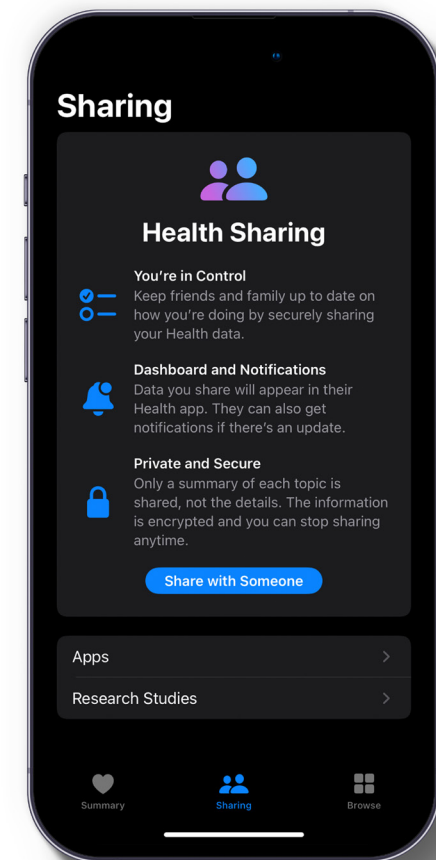
any third-party apps that are connected to HealthKit have the requirement of a having a privacy policy, which must be reviewed by the user before use. The biggest concern with this is that neither Apple, nor third-party apps have health data collection which is under HIPAA protection. HIPAA ensures that patients have a right to the privacy of their health information and ensures doctors and health organisations cannot share that data without consent. So, although HealthKit and third-party apps have privacy policies, these policies aren't regulated and may not be as private as users think.

Health apps have come a long way since initially being released, but they are still relatively new and need to be further developed to ensure that they can effectively support and help users have agency in their lives. In the initial release of the Health app, it excluded a lot of data. For example, it lacked a menstrual cycle tracker, which would have catered to half of its audience. It has since been added to the app,

alongside over a hundred other types of health data. Dr. Rigved V. Tadwalkar, board certified cardiologist at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, California even said "I think most physicians would agree there's too much data to take in, which can cloud the general overview of their patient's health, and I think the biggest disconnect is that many patients have a difficult time understanding that not every data point is necessarily actionable." (Why Apple Wants Users to Store Their Health Data on Their Devices, 2022). Data collection to this extent can be anxiety-provoking and overwhelming for some users, and it can be hard to separate the useful data from the unnecessary data. This has the potential to cause a negative impact on the mental health and health habits of users.

Overall, Apple's HealthKit can be a powerful tool in empowering users to take control of their health and helping patients share necessary

data with their doctors, but it is up to the user to decide whether the pros outweigh the cons.



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Aspects of the Health App

Summary Page:

- Starts with the 'Favourites' section, where the user can pick and choose which health data can be the fastest accessible on the home page of the app.
- Links to the 'Trends' page, where the app can show the user patterns in their health and fitness data.
- Highlights, which shows the average number of steps per day for each week the user has been tracking.
- In addition to these features, the summary page also shows suggested apps and articles based on the data shared with Apple on the Health app.

Sharing Page:

- The notification on the Sharing page, shows the settings that a user can change to share with anybody, as well as the choice to accept notifications. Additionally, the user may opt into research studies based on the data they share, or receive app suggestions.

Browse Page:

- Shows the different categories that the user may choose to track their data in. The user may also choose to have their health records available at the bottom of the page.



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