

## YOUR HEALTH



### Holiday Gift Guide: Fitness gadgets to revive motivation

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(Getty Images)

The training regimen -- if you can call it that -- for my first triathlon included nothing more high-tech than a \$35 digital watch and a basic MP3 player. But now that winter is arriving, sapping my motivation to get off the couch, I've started looking at fitness gadgets that could help refresh my workouts. A swimmer, biker, runner or walker on your holiday list might like a high-tech nudge out the door, too.

**Garmin Forerunner 405**, \$300: Even though I had never used a GPS watch or a heart rate monitor, a few minutes with the quick-start guide were all I needed to get this oversized sports watch into action, tracking how far and fast I was going. *Cool:* It wirelessly sends workout data to a PC if you plug an included USB stick into the computer. The free software I downloaded from Garmin's Web site looks a little outdated, but organizes workouts by date, displays routes on

a map and draws charts for heart rate and speed over time. Useful for all land activities, including walking, biking and gym workouts (as a heart rate monitor). It can pause automatically when you stop moving. And there's lots of room to grow with advanced settings, like custom workouts with heart rate or pace goals.

*Confusing:* The watch has two buttons and a bezel that's sensitive to touch; navigating menus involves a frustrating combination of pushing buttons and tapping and swiping the bezel. The menus themselves aren't intuitive, so reading the whole manual is a must.

- **Nike + iPod Sport Kit**, \$29: This is an inexpensive way to get excited again about walking and running with an existing iPod Nano or an iPod Touch. When synched with a sensor in your shoe, your iPod's screen shows time, pace and calories burned. A voice interrupts the music to announce when you've reached a goal or have a few minutes left in a timed workout.

Setup with my first-generation Nano was simple: I plugged the gadget into the iPod and taped the sensor to my shoe, selected the "basic" workout and hit the road. (You don't need tape if you have Nike running shoes, which have a hole in the sole to stash the sensor. If you don't want to use tape, Amazon.com sells sensor pouches ranging from \$2 to \$10; do-it-yourself bloggers also recommend sticky-backed Velcro dots.)

*Pros:* The iPod can automatically send data to a gorgeous, free Nike+ Web site when you do your regular docking of the player with your computer. The site stores details of each workout; you can also build a personalized training program for an upcoming race, browse workout mixes (to buy on iTunes) and connect with other people who use Nike+.

*Cons:* Only useful for walking and running workouts. No heart rate monitor or auto-pause.

- **Finis SwiMP3 v.2**, \$140: I looked like a total doofus wearing this waterproof digital music player. But when I got it working, I honestly didn't care. Having tunes in the pool was awesome.

The music player is made of two large plastic headpieces connected by a cable. They rest against your face, secured with clips to goggle straps, and send sound through your bones.

Loading up the small 256-megabyte hard drive with music was easy enough. It has a built-in USB plug and showed up on my PC like a regular thumb drive. I already have music stored on my computer, so I skipped the SwiMP3 software and dragged about 60 songs over to the gadget.

*Amazing:* It's impossible to overstate the size of my grin as I swam my first lap to a Beatles song, and I liked that there was no separate media player to strap onto my arm.

*Awkward:* SwiMP3 isn't sleek or pretty. It's hard to get the headpieces in place and find the buttons that control tracks and volume. I recommend practicing in front of a mirror first. It was also hard to get the volume just right -- loud enough to hear over my breathing, but not so loud that it hurt my head. And other swimmers thought I was nutso when I asked in a too-loud voice if they could hear the music.

(They couldn't.)

- **Rechargeable LED bike headlights**, \$100-\$500 and up: My frame of reference was a \$30 blinky safety light, so I almost fainted when I saw the prices for these bike lights. But after a few spooky autumn commutes on an unlit bike trail, I'm almost ready to take the plunge.

LED systems are brighter, last longer and are more compact than older halogen ones. Early LED

systems threw narrow, laser-like light beams, but newer ones offer better peripheral illumination. Brian Foley, cycling product manager at Recreational Equipment Inc., recommended I get two -- one for the handlebars and one for my helmet. When I gulped, he told me to just go with the helmet-mounted one for a better view around corners. For rides through urban areas with street lights, Foley recommended models that give off 100 to 150 lumens. Pick 200 lumens or higher for dark country roads or trail riding. Foley has tested all sorts of LED lights on his 18-mile commute to work, but didn't want to name a favorite. Current best-sellers at REI include NiteRider's \$99 MiNewt Mini-USB (110 lumens), which can be recharged by plugging into a computer, and the \$209 MiNewt X2 (150 lumens). Light & Motion's Stella models (200 lumens, \$179 to \$249 depending on battery type) can be mounted on either helmet or handlebar.

- **iBike iSport**, \$199: Serious cyclist friends train with power meters, and say it's more accurate than using a heart rate monitor to get the most out of a workout and to measure progress over time. But true power meters, which measure how much force you exert on the bike's pedals, can cost \$1,000 or more. So for holiday gifts, you might check out the iSport, which looks like a bike computer. It mounts on the handlebars and measures other things, including steepness of hills and strength of headwinds, to come up with similar results. Some reviewers have questioned the accuracy of iBike devices, but iBike CEO John Hamann says the iSport, which just launched, has a newer, faster processor and software that together are better at crunching the data.

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