



How the right app can make you healthier

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By Elizabeth Armstrong Moore

Mobile health technology continues to prove itself. The latest example comes in the form of on-the-go diabetes management.

In a recent small trial, 30 patients with type 2 diabetes spent 12 months using a smartphone app that provided real-time feedback on their blood-sugar levels, prompted them when to eat or take other action, and sent digital logbooks of their readings back to their doctors.

The surprising result: these patients had [58 percent fewer ER and hospital visits](#) over the year of the study than they'd had the previous year.

It's important not to overinterpret that result. Not only was the trial small, but it didn't compare folks who used the app--the [WellDoc DiabetesManager](#)--to those who didn't.

Still, if the finding is even roughly indicative of the way mobile technology can spur people to take better care of themselves, there's potentially a lot of money to be saved--for patients, insurance companies, and taxpayers alike.

"This project demonstrated that a mobile health diabetes self-management program can benefit a high-risk Medicaid population using their own cell phones ... and should support all 'links in the chain,' including patients, providers, educators, and nurses," study head Richard Katz, director of the cardiology division at George Washington University Hospital, said in a news release. Katz presented the results this morning at the [mHealth Summit](#) in Washington, D.C.

The American Diabetes Association estimates that diabetes care costs the U.S. \$218 billion annually. In 2008 alone, diabetes-related hospital fees ran an \$83 billion bill, a quarter of all hospital spending for the year, which comes out to \$10,937 per visit, according to a [report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#).

The WellDoc study comes on the heels of another randomized control trial--published in the September 2011 issue [of the journal Diabetes Care](#)--which found that patients using WellDoc's diabetes manager in addition to their usual care had a drop in [A1C levels](#) (a test that measures one's average blood glucose control for the past two to three months) almost three times greater than those treated with just their usual care.