

The Ultimate Beginner's Guide and List of the Best Personal Data Tools Out There) @Technori

A transformation is happening.

People, like you, are taking control of something conventional wisdom has told us is not ours to understand: our health. Why are we fat? What makes us feel sluggish? What causes our disease? How can I improve? Today, we ask our doctors. Tomorrow, we will ask our data.

Watch Ari Meisel [explain how he cured his Crohn's disease](#) by following data. Here's Larry Smarr [doing it as well](#). Even Tim Ferriss [tracks data in his life](#) to hack his way to better health.

This is the [Quantified Self](#). In short, it is self-knowledge through self-tracking.

This is not new. Benjamin Franklin famously tracked 13 personal virtues in a daily journal to push himself toward moral perfection. He shared this insight in his autobiography: "I was surprised to find myself so much fuller of faults than I had imagined, but I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish."

The only difference today is the technology. Advancements have not only made data collection cheaper and more convenient, but is allowing us to quantify biometrics we never knew existed. Want to know your insulin or cortisol levels, or sequence your DNA, or learn what microbial cells inhabit your body? You can quantify that now.

Self-trackers are pushing the limits of personal health. By using a scientific approach, they are shedding light into a dark unknown. As they discover hidden insights, it is the entrepreneurs who are bringing their findings—and their tools—to the masses.

As self-trackers are pushing the movement forward, entrepreneurs are helping it scale.

Why this matters

Where there are trends, there are opportunities. About [69% of US adults](#) track at least one health metric; however, almost half are still tracking in their heads. This is a problem entrepreneurs are looking to fix and venture capitalists are funding. In fact, VC funding in this space [doubled](#) last year.

Crowdfunding sites are often a good indicator of market trends, and quantified self tools are among the most successful. The [Misfit Shine](#), an elegant activity tracker, raised \$446k. [uBiome](#), a startup that can sequence your microbiome, raised \$351k. [Pebble](#), a customizable watch that can track and analyze activity, raised \$10 million. [Amiigo](#), an automated fitness and workout tracker, raised \$580k. These products are grabbing the interest and money of early adopters. Many of these, and more, also made an appearance at the [Consumer Electronics Show](#) and this year's [SXSW](#).

Making it personal

Are you becoming happier over time?

Are your mind and body performing better?

Are your days more productive than they were a year ago?

Unfortunately, happiness, performance, productivity, and other variables in our lives are complex, confusing, and chaotic processes. Every day we blindly make decisions we hope lead to improvement. To make matters worse, we judge success based on imperfect and biased feelings. If our world is dark, it seems we are also covering our eyes.

What about your startup? It began with a problem. You recognized it and believed, “I can fix this.” How? You likely tested your solution, tracked key measures of success, and adjusted course when necessary.

In other words, instead of relying on intuition or feelings, you use data. Your company’s growth rate, web traffic, conversions, and even the way users interact with your homepage are all measured and analyzed. If you aren’t measuring key metrics you won’t manage progress and you can’t make the best decisions.

Our daily lives are no different. We want to make the best decisions, yet we lack appropriate data to guide us.

Let’s change that.

How to get started

You are busy, so here are a few templates to start.

1. Want to lose weight? Keep a food log. Use [MyFitnessPal](#), pen and paper, or just take a picture. Tracking your food intake will lead to interesting insights about your diet and health. A [2008 study](#) also showed that the act of tracking food further facilitates weight loss.
2. Searching for happiness? Track your mood. I used [AskMeEvery](#) (a site I now run) to track my mood for 3 months and it proved that I was unhappy with my job. Soon after, I quit. Other good apps include [MercuryApp](#) and [TrackYourHappiness](#). We often are not mindful of our changing moods or the factors that affect them. Tracking them daily keeps us self-aware.
3. Need to move more? Track your activity. There are tons of great tools including [Fitbit](#), [Nike Fuelband](#), [Jawbone UP](#), [Basis](#), [Omron](#), and more. Your iPhone can also track your activity. I use an app called [Moves](#).

Let’s begin

Track something that matters to you.

It doesn’t need to be structured or complex. In fact, keep it simple. Track one thing for one week in the easiest way. Pick something that is important to you—maybe you keep a tally every time you drink a glass of water or you record how many hours you slept last night. The act of tracking increases your awareness, which has immediate benefits. After a few days, the data will highlight trends and behaviors you may not have known.

If you prefer structure, you can follow a framework, similar to the lean methodology, to ensure validated learning. This framework starts with a hypothesis. Through planning, it becomes an experiment. Data is then collected and analyzed which triggers insights that iterate the cycle.

For more details on these steps, [read this article on designing OS experiments](#).

The future

I am consistently humbled by the adventurous and curious spirit of self-trackers. As entrepreneurs, we're no different. We're all wired to solve problems.

We are fortunate to live at a time when technology is enabling the exploration of solutions. Suddenly, we are all scientists and our discoveries are limited only by our imaginations. As sensors are added to our phones, glasses, clothing, and even implanted within our bodies, the potential for what is imaginable is growing.

As a self-quantifier, I see the potential to control my own health and to modify my behaviors to optimize the length and quality of my life. As an entrepreneur, I see a revolution of the healthcare industry. Soon, technology will be spotting trends and diagnosing problems far quicker and more accurately than doctors.

As data from people around the world are aggregated, explored, and decoded into bits of knowledge, imagine the discoveries that become possible, the mysteries of the human experience that can be solved. With hands at our sides and eyes open, our world becomes that much brighter.

So close that KISSmetrics tab, put down your sales projections, and archive your marketing statistics. Answer this question: what is important to you?

Now go track it.

Top tools for data collection and visualization

The lists below include some, but not all devices. Be sure to do your research when picking the best device for you.

Track anything

To start: Use pen and paper or a digital spreadsheet (Google Drive or Excel).

My recommendation: AskMeEvery – Simple tracking of meaningful data via email or text

Alternatives: IFTTT – Connect your online services (ie. Save foursquare checkins to Google Drive).

Daytum – Collect, categorize, and communicate everyday data.

Activity

To start: Moves – free mobile app

My recommendation: Fitbit. They are one of the few activity tracking companies that promote an open API.

Alternatives: Nike Fuelband, Amiigo, Bodymedia, Omron, Misfit Shine, Jawbone Up, RunKeeper, Strava

Sleep

To start: SleepCycle – mobile app

My recommendation: Zeo

Alternatives: Wakemate, Lark

Mood

My recommendation: Happiness

Alternatives: MoodPanda, Moodscope, Moodjam, MercuryApp

Heart

To start: Cardiio – uses the iPhone camera to measure heart rate

My recommendation: Emwave2 – heart rate variability tracking and stress reduction

Alternatives: Polar, Mio, Basis, Mythlete, Adidas miCoach – training shirt with heart rate sensors, Tinke –

heart rate variability

Blood Pressure / Weight

My recommendation: [Withings](#)

Alternatives: [Blipcare](#), [iHealth](#)

Blood Testing

My recommendation: [WellnessFX](#)

Alternatives: [InsideTracker](#), [Talking20](#)

Miscellaneous

Visualization tools: Excel, [Tictrac](#), [Nineteen](#). [Indiemapper](#)

Inspiration: [FlowingData](#), [Feltron Reports](#), [Visualizing.org](#)

If you want to learn what others are tracking or share your own experiences, join the [Quantified Self meetup community](#).

Join the Starter Movement!

Find out for yourself why starters love our newsletter so much. Only the articles and news you want and need, delivered weekly.

Excerpted from *Quantified Self: The Ultimate Beginner's Guide and List of the Best Personal Data Tools Out There* @Technori
<http://technori.com/2013/04/4281-the-beginners-guide-to-quantified-self-plus-a-list-of-the-best-personal-data-tools-out-there/>

[READABILITY — An Arc90 Laboratory Experiment](#) <http://lab.arc90.com/experiments/readability>