



Ask a Nutritionist

by Tara Postnikoff

Q: What are some recommended apps for runners to use to help with nutrition?

A: With today's technology, you can look up just about anything online and have access to an almost endless pool of data (both accurate and inaccurate). Most of us live attached to our phones, tablets and computers. With a few clicks, taps or swipes, we can find out how many calories or grams of fat are in the item we are consuming, or the location of the closest coffee shop, vegan restaurant or farmer's market.

Does having access to all this information make us any healthier or more educated in our food choices, or play a positive role in our nutritional decisions? On the surface, it might seem like an easy 'yes'. After all, since we know how many calories something contains, as well as its nutrient profile, we should be able to make a more educated decision. In reality, though, if you place a head of broccoli next to a piece of chocolate cake with both of their nutrition information visible, which one will you pick?

So, while individual tastes and willpower still play a role, there are many websites and apps available to help us make the right choice and stay on track with our nutrition.

Calorie Counters

Calorie tracking apps and websites such as Fit Day, Lose It, My Fitness Pal, Calorie King and Training Peaks allow you to input your food selections manually or by scanning barcodes. Tracking your calories may help if you are trying to lose weight or gain weight, but these values are based on the "combustible" lab averages of foods. There is no way of knowing exactly how many calories we are consuming in real life situations, as well as what we are absorbing or utilizing throughout the day. Counting calories is not as simple as calories in versus calories out, and it doesn't always help us eat better. However, these can be useful tools to opening up your eyes to how much you really eat.

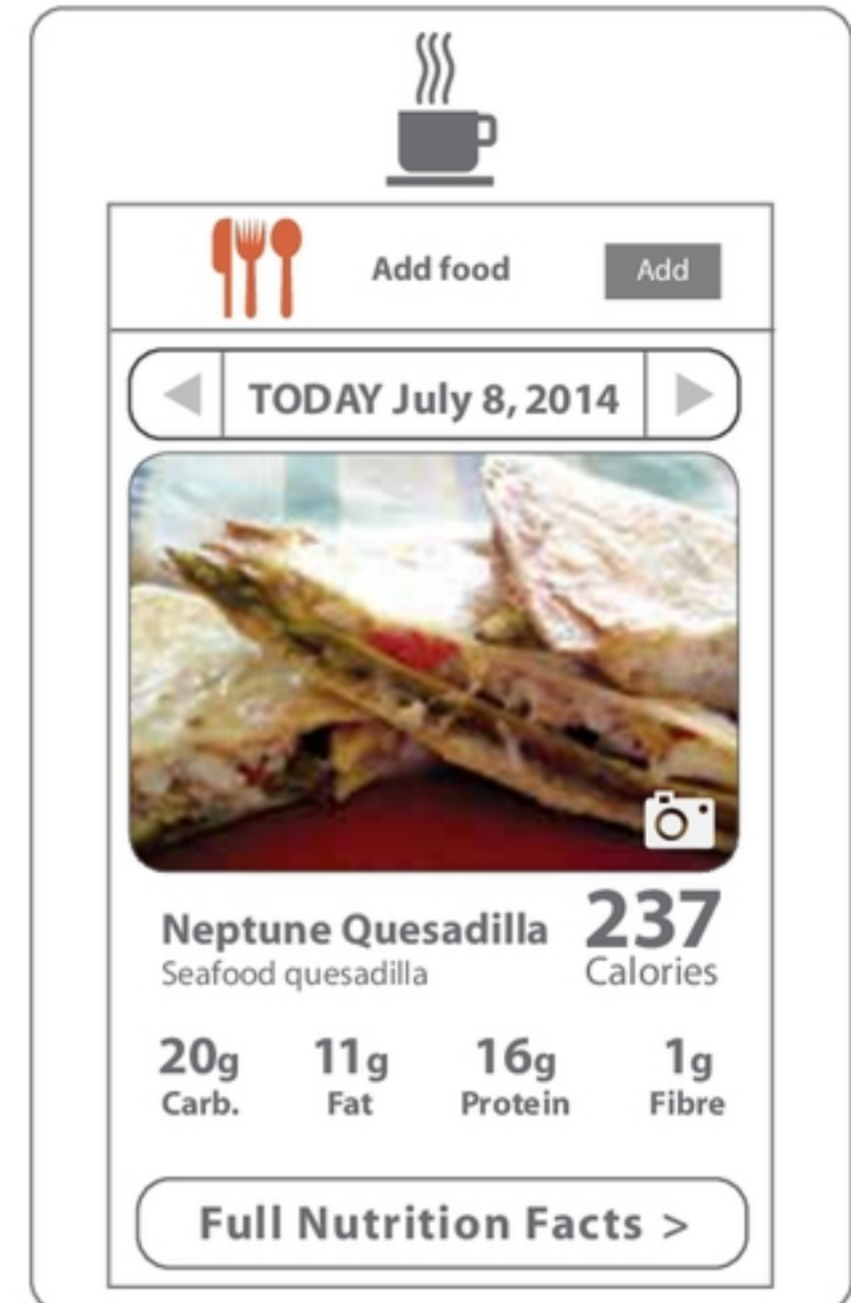
Nutrition Details

If you'd rather get information on specific foods, check out www.nutritiondata.com. Not only does it give you the caloric and macronutrient info, it has the micronutrient info, amino acid profile, and glycemic load for almost all foods you'd come across. Foodle is an app that has a similar breakdown, although you have to pay for the premium features.

Specialty Trackers

If you want to track a specific area of your diet, you can try various water trackers, sodium trackers or sugar trackers. This can be a great way to help you meet your quota of water or stay under a certain sodium level without getting too wrapped up in all the other data.

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Another cool app is The Photo Cookbook, which shows you a picture of the finished product and then gives you a visual recipe with large step-by-step pictures. Not all the recipes are healthy, but if you are looking for some culinary inspiration, this can help.

More advanced apps exist in conjunction with high-tech products like Fitbit devices or the Bodybugg calorie management system. These pieces of equipment help track various body metrics such as heart rate, body temperature and even include accelerometers to help you monitor your sleep and calculate your calories burned more accurately.

Of course, the technology is only as useful as you make it. Once you have all the information, you need to know what it means and decide what you are going to do with it. After all, the app is not going to cook your food or help you eat it, but you can use technology to learn a bit more about what you are eating. **RR**