

# The popular health apps collecting your personal data

We know by now that when we use apps, our data is up for grabs. Thanks to Apple's new privacy labels, we know exactly what data each app collects, from name, age and address, to weight or sexual activity.

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As part of the new [Health App Index](#), researchers at Uswitch have looked at 15 popular health apps and researched how much data each app is saving.

How do the most-searched health apps stack up when it comes to [data collection](#)? Catherine Hiley, mobiles expert at [Uswitch.com](#), explains how to boost your privacy on health apps without limiting your experience.

## MyFitnessPal – 20 out of 24 data points

MyFitnessPal tracks diet and exercise, gamifying the experience to motivate users to scan the barcodes of various food items into the app's large pre-existing database. The app collects the most data out of the whole list, ranging from name and age, all the way through to more private information like body mass index (BMI) and fitness level.

*How to manage your privacy settings*

Catherine says: "You can tweak the settings of your app to control what

information you make public to your friends and what data you keep private. You can also stop MyFitnessPal from sharing your location data by going to the right-hand corner of the app and selecting more > privacy centre > personalisation.

“Unfortunately, we couldn’t find a setting to opt-out of third-party data sharing.”

## Fitbit – 18 out of 22 data points

Fitbit dominates the fitness app market, with almost 60% share of all users who use fitness-tracking apps. It also rates highly on the list of companies that collect personal data from their users, collecting 18 out of 22 items of data including social media information and female health.

### *How to manage your privacy settings*

“During the setup process, you can deny access to most personal information by changing your account settings in the app. Looking at the privacy policy in more detail, we found that Fitbit aggregates and anonymises data to share with marketing partners. It doesn’t look like there’s a way to opt-out of this.”

## Strava – 17 out of 22 data points

Strava has almost 50 million users across the globe and has a total of three billion activity uploads, meaning it holds a lot of data about each of its users. It’s one of the most popular apps on the market and collects a whole range of data, including location and email address.

Although users own the rights to all of their workouts, posts and routes, Strava’s privacy policy states that it reserves the right to use it.

### *How to manage your privacy settings*

“When you download the app and sign up, you give Strava automatic access to all of your data, including the public mapping feature. This element could reveal where you live or exercise, so be sure to manually change the settings before use,” says Catherine.

“The app guides users through this and we found it very easy to do, so all our information remained private.”

## Flo – 15 out of 22 data points

Fertility app Flo is used by more than 30 million people around the world to monitor their feminine health, but recently the app has been in the news regarding privacy concerns.

Out of all the period tracking apps in the study, Flo collects the most data with 15 out of 22 data points. This includes mental wellbeing and sexual activity.

### *How to manage your privacy settings*

“There are some very simple settings within the privacy section of the app that you can toggle on or off depending on your preference. It’s worth noting that these need to be turned on or off manually once you have signed up for an account with Flo.

“Interestingly, Flo has a dedicated Data Protection Officer that you can contact about any data privacy concerns,” says Catherine.

## Headspace – 14 out of 22 data points

Headspace was one of the first mindfulness and meditation apps on the market, reaching more than 62 million users across the globe. The app is packed full of audio meditation sessions that users can tap into, but it’s also collecting plenty of data.

Of the mindfulness apps in the study, Headspace asks for the most personal user data with 14 out of 22 data points collected, including location and family or marital status.

### *How to manage your privacy settings*

Catherine says: “Headspace says that they will use personal data to inform the way that the app interacts with you via email and in-app adverts. It’s pretty simple to opt-out using the in-app options.

“As with most apps in the study, you need to remember to manually go through this process, as the default settings don’t protect your data.”

To safeguard your personal information, USwitch advises to:

- Do your research before downloading and installing an app

- Be wary before agreeing to permissions

Keep your apps up to date and delete any that you don't use

Keep on top of your mobile app permissions

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