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REVIEWS

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Jawbone Up3 review

Just buy an Up2

By Chris Welch, a reviewer specializing in personal audio and home theater. Since 2011, he has published nearly 6,000 articles, from breaking news and reviews to useful how-tos.

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Jawbone's back.

After months of delays (that didn't go unnoticed by

customers), its latest flagship fitness tracker, the Up3, is finally shipping. It's "the world's most advanced tracker," according to Jawbone's marketing campaign. Put it next to the \$99 Up2 or last year's Up24, and the company will point out that the Up3 contains more sensors, and that those sensors have more advanced capabilities. From a technology perspective, sure, this \$179 Up3 is the best device Jawbone has produced. But is that enough for it to stand up against a new wave of competition?

Companies big and small are trying to build the one true fitness companion that wraps around your wrist; on the high end, Jawbone is facing off against Microsoft Band and Apple Watch. On the low end, it's got companies like Misfit eager to establish a spot. And then there's longtime rival Fitbit, which recently rolled out its own updated lineup of health trackers. I've recently taken a greater interest in staying fit and maintaining some semblance of a healthy lifestyle, so the Up3 arrived at a pretty great time for me. I just wish it were a better product.

The Up3 features a design that's not far off from the less-expensive Up2. It's a bit larger and chunkier overall to accommodate for the added technology inside, but not noticeably so if you're looking at the thing on someone's wrist. Most of the Up3's guts are located inside an aluminum casing that sits on the top of your wrist. The Up3 is splash-proof and safe for the shower, but you won't want to submerge it. After originally promising that it would be fully waterproof (a requirement for swimmers), Jawbone realized during

mass production that it couldn't follow through and had to go back on its word. The downgrade is disappointing, but you can't take Microsoft Band or the Apple Watch underwater, either.



As it turns out, some of the Up3's most important sensors are actually located on the inside of its strap. Look at the band's underside and you'll see a total of five gold-colored squares that make contact with your skin whenever it's strapped on. These are what separate the Up3 from all the Ups that have come before it. They're bioimpedance sensors that can measure your resting heart rate and make the Up3's improved sleep-tracking features possible by monitoring your respiration rate, body temperature, and galvanic skin response.

"Showering's fine, but don't take it in a pool"

With these, the Up3 can track the stages of your sleep every night between light, deep, and REM. That's something the Up2 won't do. Instead, the less expensive model guesses your sleep patterns based on movement using its accelerometer.

Unfortunately, the Up3 has the same poorly designed, awkward clasp as the Up2. Worse yet, it doesn't even guarantee a secure fit; the Up3 has randomly come loose on a few occasions over the week I've been wearing it. It's never happened while I was asleep, but it still makes me think there had to be a better, simpler way. If there's one plus, it's that you won't be taking it off frequently. The Up3's battery life is exceptional, and it'll last nearly a week on a single charge.

A word of advice on style: go with the black one. Jawbone gave me a gray-and-silver model for review, and I never once received a compliment for its appearance. Like most other fitness bands, the black version won't attract much attention. But this one? It screams, "Oh, that's one of those fitness things."

The best thing about this product is Jawbone's app on your smartphone. I came away impressed with its ability to automatically detect when I'd started working out or fallen asleep. Jawbone does give you the option to manually switch between activity and sleep-tracking modes, and you really should, since it's the only way for the Up3 to figure out how long it takes for you to fall asleep.



But to make that switch, you have to suffer through a pretty awful user experience. Your physical interactions with the Up3 (and Up2) are based around a bewildering system of taps. Tap twice to wake it up, and then hold to toggle between modes. That'd be simple enough if it worked reliably every time, but I regularly found myself tapping repeatedly to trigger the lights hidden beneath the Up3's aluminum housing. Too often, it just didn't register. Next time, they should really put a button on it. Jawbone has told me that the sensitivity around these controls might be fine-tuned in a coming firmware update.

"Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap"

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