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Basis Science Basis B1 Band review: 24-7 fitness watch isn't small but motivates well

For \$199, the Basis Band from Basis Science boasts a bevy of sensors and tech that record heart rate, sleep, and steps, plus it syncs with iPhones and Android devices via Bluetooth.

**Brian Bennett**

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8 min read 

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The \$199 Basis B1 Band from Basis Science puts a new spin on the personal health monitor. It may be larger and more expensive than similar products, but it's also way more capable, plus its watch-style design is very handy, and it syncs with iPhones and various Android handsets wirelessly.

THE GOOD

The **Basis B1 Band** by Basis Science tracks steps, calories, heart rate, and sleep automatically, syncs wirelessly via Bluetooth with iOS devices and a variety of Android smartphones, and has clever motivational software. Its watch design

is handy and comfortable, too.

7.7

Basis Science Basis B1 Band

THE BAD

The Basis Band is big, bulky, and expensive compared with other health trackers.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The \$199 Basis Band offers a powerful mix of sensors and motivational tools, but pass if you'd rather spend less on a fitness tracker or aren't partial to big, watch-style designs.

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Like many similar products on the market, such as the Jawbone Up, Nike FuelBand, and [Fitbit Flex](#), this watch-style gadget tracks steps and basic activity level. Additionally, the Basis Band measures how long and how well you sleep, a trick both the [Jawbone Up24](#) and [Fitbit Force](#) manage as well. What really sets the Basis Band apart is that it also keeps an eye on heart rate, skin temperature, and perspiration. It uses this information to record sleep data and is the first device of its kind to do so automatically. Also innovative is how the Basis Band pushes users to adopt "healthy habits" such as burning more calories by taking walks throughout the day. All this makes the Basis is one of the best personal fitness trackers available.

Editors' Note, January 27, 2014: This review was updated to include our experience using the Basis Band's enhanced sleep and activity tracking.

Design

When I first got my hands on the Basis Band, I admit I wasn't blown away by its styling. At first glance the Basis looks like a standard, even basic digital watch. It's not exactly thin, either; its monochrome LCD screen is small, and there's only one obvious button, which is located on the right edge.

Flip the watch over, however, and you'll begin to realize that this is no ordinary timepiece. On the bottom of the device are six stud-shaped sensors and two green LED lights. The Basis uses these to measure your heart rate by estimating blood flow through your skin.



Sensors record biometric stats.
Brian Bennett/CNET

Additionally, the four silver circles in each corner of the watch face (which I initially thought were ordinary screws) are capacitive buttons. The two buttons on the right cycle up and down through views of

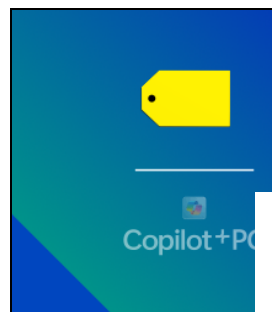
steps, calories, and heart rate data. The key in the top-left corner activates the Basis Band's backlight, and tapping the bottom-left button pulls up the date.

It turns out that these fancy touch-sensitive controls aren't just for show. They help you operate the watch in wet environs without fear of moisture entering the Basis' chassis. Indeed, the Basis Band is splash-resistant, so taking it out in the rain or keeping it on in the shower isn't a problem.

On the left edge of the watch are four metal contacts. They connect to the Basis Band's wired charging cradle, which in turn plugs into USB ports. The folks at Basis Science claim the watch's lithium polymer battery can run the Band for four days straight between charges.

The original Basis B1 Band model shipped with a stock plastic strap (black or white). To add a bit more oomph to the Basis Band's visual impact, Basis Science also offers artist-designed wrist straps to replace this rather plain band. For example the company once sold upgrades such as the Cityscape band (\$34.95) which starts with a white background but is stenciled with a stylized cartoon street scene.

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A look at some add-on bands including the Cityscape, Carbon Steel, and Electric Spring.
Basis Science

Sadly this Cityscape option appears to have sold out but other choices include the colorful Kaleidoscope (\$34.95) and Electric Spring (\$34.95) straps. My favorite though is a more conservative and more expensive Carbon Steel (\$49.95). It gives the Basis Band a handsome touch of metallic silver and black silicone.

You'll be glad to learn, however, that in January 2014 Basis began bundling the premium Carbon Steel strap with its tracker. Called the Basis Carbon Steel Edition, the fresh package costs the same \$199 that the original Basis B1 band did, while its predecessor drops to \$179 and will be sold until supplies are exhausted.

Features

As mentioned before, the Basis Band uses a built-in accelerometer to record the steps you take. But its features go way beyond those of the average pedometer. The device relies on a pair of green LED emitters to pulse light into your wrist periodically. An optical sensor uses the pulse to calculate the amount of blood flowing through your skin, and ultimately your heart rate.

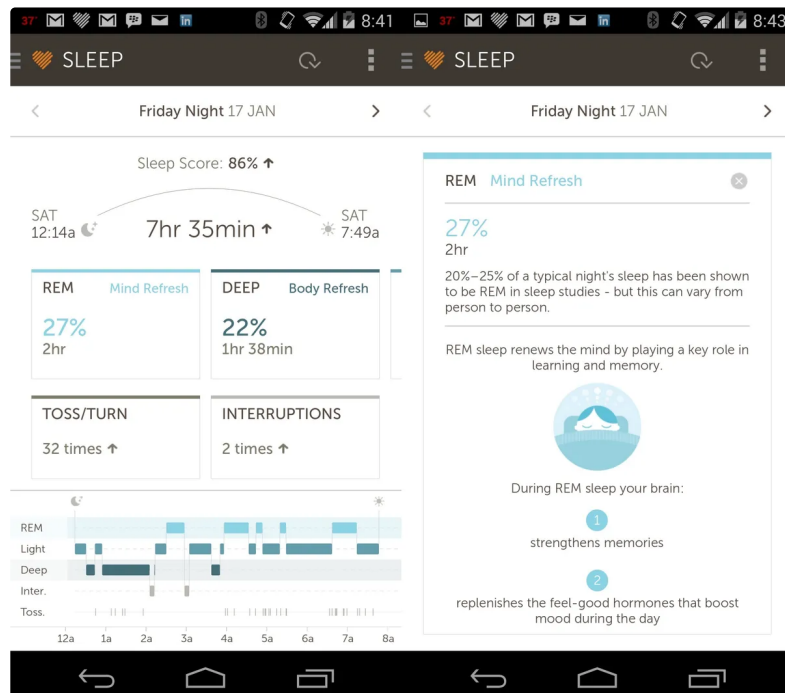
Other sensors take note of your skin temperature and perspiration level. Since body temperature typically drops significantly during sleep, as does heart rate, the Basis uses the data its sensors generates to determine the length and quality of your slumbering. What's more, the device does so automatically. Other gadgets, such as the [Jawbone](#)

Up24 and Fitbit Force, require that you press a button to begin sleep logging. After a very long day, remembering this step can be a tall order.

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Deeper sleep analysis

Automatically capturing a snapshot of how long you sleep is just the beginning of the Basis Band's nocturnal abilities. Indeed, thanks to a recent software update the gadget will now breakdown recorded sleep by several criteria.



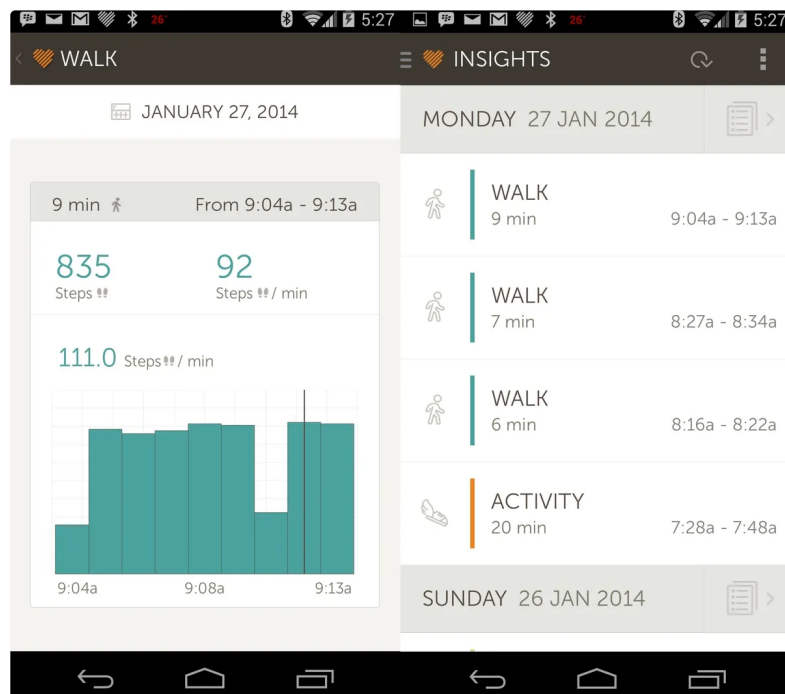
The Basis Band now breaks down sleep by REM, Deep, and other criteria.

Brian Bennett/CNET

These include the percentage of time the band thinks your mind spent restoring itself in REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, deep sleep (recharging the body), along with how many times you tossed and turned, or how often your Zs were flat-out interrupted. With all this measured, the Basis mobile app (Android and iOS) will also provide a personalized sleep score. Listed as a percentage, Basis says this stat is calculated by comparing nightly slumber against your current lifetime sleep performance.

Automagical fitness tracking

Sleep isn't the only bodily activity the Basis Band tracks and quantifies on autopilot. The device also leans heavily on its array of advanced sensors to figure out just what kind of physical exertion you're currently engaged in. Termed Body IQ, the watch can comprehend when you've started out on a serious stroll, begun to actually run, or even have hopped on a bike for zip around town.

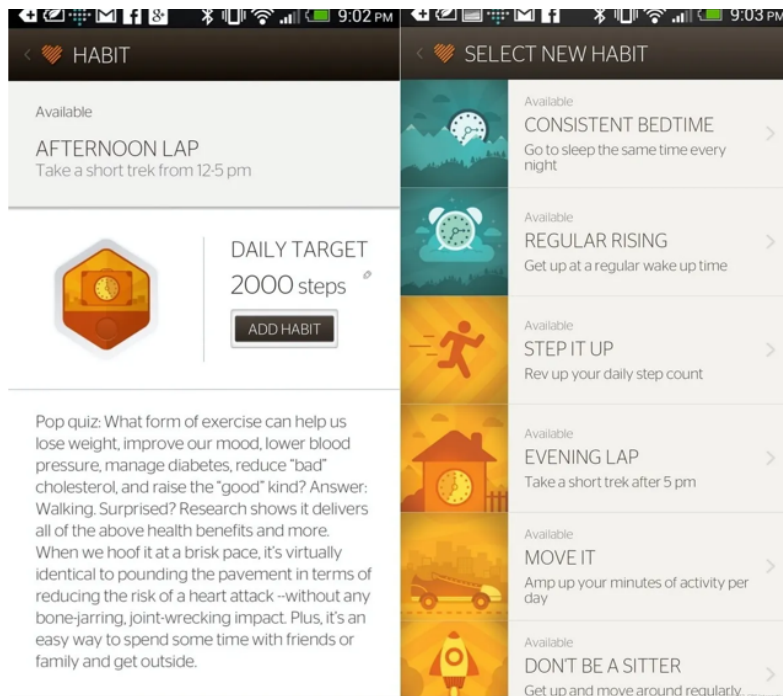


Automatically log daily activity by type.
Brian Bennett/CNET

Get on the wagon

What's really innovative about the Basis Band and the Basis system is how they're built around what the company calls "healthy habits." Essentially, to buy into the Basis lifestyle, you must adopt various preset behavior patterns. For instance, the Get More Sleep "habit" asks you to log a certain amount of sleep for at least one night a week. The more nights you fulfill your requirements, the more points you earn.

You can then use the points accrued toward opening up access to more habits. Gaining more habits ups the level of your profile, which also rewards you with more-demanding habits to choose from -- and I imagine some bragging rights, too.



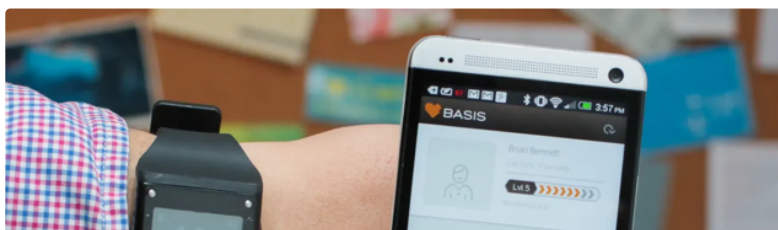
Unlock new habits to establish by gaining points.

Screenshot by Brian Bennett/CNET

Better syncing with Bluetooth

A new capability, and one that Basis has been promising since it first showcased the Basis Band a few years ago, is wireless syncing via Bluetooth with a companion Android app. I had the privilege of getting my hands on the application ahead of its official launch. At the time the app was technically supposed to work on Samsung's Galaxy S2, Galaxy S3, Galaxy S4, Galaxy Note, and Galaxy Note 2 smartphones.

Recently the company has extended app support to iOS devices as well as more Android phones such as the Galaxy Nexus, Nexus 4, Nexus 5, HTC One, and Moto X, not to mention the Galaxy Note 3.



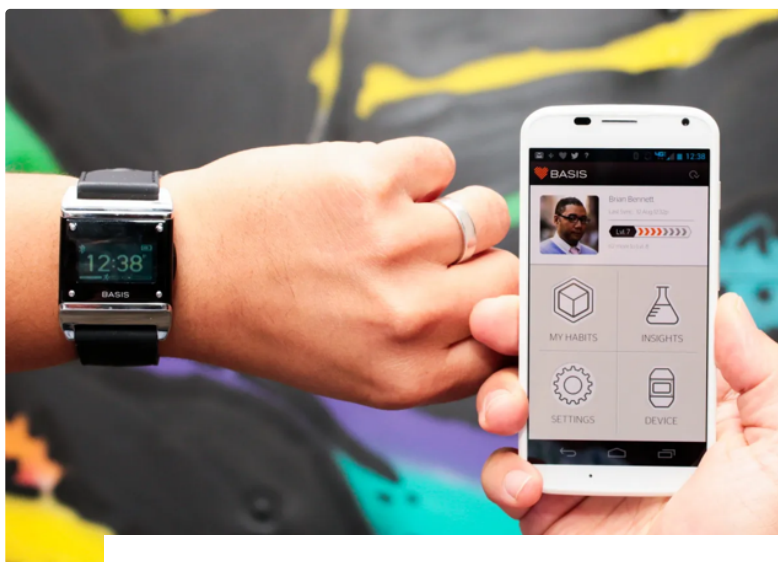


The Basis Band now syncs via Bluetooth with Android smartphones running a custom app.
Sarah Tew/CNET

Performance

I have to say that I'm impressed so far with the Basis Band's performance. The software is smooth, and aside from a brief glitch or two, it operates as advertised. I successfully had the software up and running on my HTC One and LG Nexus 4 test phones. I even got it to work properly with my Motorola Moto X eval unit. Be advised that you'll be able to download the Basis application from the Google Play store using only the officially sanctioned devices.

Powering the Basis Band is a lithium-polymer battery that you recharge via the bundled watch cradle. Thankfully, the cradle, which connects to PCs and Macs through a USB port, also syncs recorded data with Basis servers while its charging.



The Basis app
Sarah Tew/CNI

The Basis Band is rated to provide up to four days of battery life, which squares with what I experienced. I did find that the best way to keep the gadget always powered up was to unstrap it first thing in the morning and drop it in its cradle for a quick sync and juice-up (about 15 to 20 minutes). This daily ritual enabled the watch to carry on indefinitely.

In a similar vein, while Basis Science says the Band is water-resistant enough to withstand showers, doing dishes, and splashes in the pool, I don't suggest you soak it repeatedly. The first Basis unit I tested suddenly succumbed to quirky behavior such as refusal to sync (both

wired and over Bluetooth) before dying completely. Now I can't confirm whether regular showers and soap is what did it in, but I have my suspicions. The replacement device works just fine, by the way.

Be advised though that I did run into a few odd performance issues, aside from my damaged unit. Every once in a while the Basis Band incorrectly tracked my sleep duration. Apparently the watch lost adequate connection with my wrist, and perhaps my skin temperature and heart rate. Whatever the cause, the device would log only a few hours of Zs when I knew I had at least 6 hours.

Likewise, I observed that the watch requires a pretty tight seal between your wrist and its underside in order for the gadget to measure heart rate. That means that if you like to wear your timepieces a little loose, the Basis isn't for you.

Despite its ambitious AI-like goals, however, the Basis Band's slick Body IQ function operated relatively smoothly. For the most part it correctly comprehended when I walked as opposed to when I stepped things up and went for a quick jog. That said, the watch wasn't infallible here either. For example, one afternoon the device thought I went cycling for 10 minutes. Unfortunately the only activity I engaged in then was speedily pushing a stroller across snow-laden NYC streets, a rousing ride to be sure, but not exactly the Tour de France.

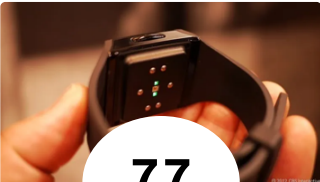
One absolutely stellar trick the Basis Band does, something other high-tech watches really should imitate, is to automatically fire up its LCD's backlight when you twist your wrist and swing your arm for a closer look.

Conclusion

Sure, it can be cumbersome to wear a watch 24-7, especially one as thick as the Basis Band. Other wrist-style fitness gadgets, such as the [Fitbit Force](#) and [Jawbone Up24](#) for instance, are much closer to effortless to live with. That said, Basis Band is relatively compact and light compared with many all-metal timepieces I've owned.

I also think the habit approach to changing people's behavior has a shot at succeeding and hopefully motivating people (not just the fitness-crazed) to live a better lifestyle. I know that I find the Basis system the most addictive "personal wellness solution" I've used. That said, its \$199 price tag is practically double what the \$99.99 Up24 and \$129.99 Force cost, both of which offer many of the same capabilities.

But even with its rough spots, the Basis Band is the most capable fitness tracker money can buy.



SCORE BREAKDOWN	
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**Basis Science Basis B1
Band**

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Geoffrey Morrison

July 14, 2025 4:00 a.m. PT

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