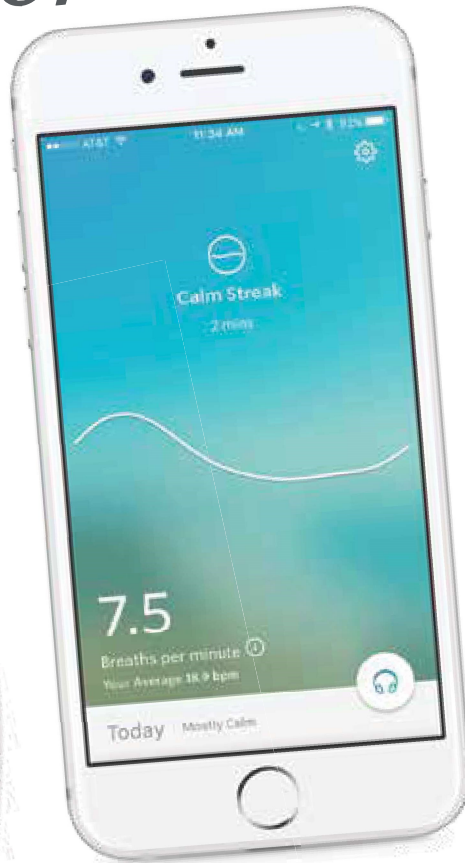


REVIEW

The Spire Mindfulness Tracker

Our editor tests this pocket-sized breath coach.

BY MICHAEL A. MILLER



It's mesmerizing to visualize your breath, but more importantly, it's a tool for recognizing and improving your mood and emotional state. That's why a new wearable device is utilizing breath patterns to help users banish stress and anxiety.

The Spire is a new addition to the Internet of Things designed by Stanford University's Calming Technology Lab that aims to tell you when and why you're tense and how to manage it. The wearable device clips to your pants (or bra) and translates the motion of your breath into your own unique "breathwave" and notifies you in real time when your breath goes awry. But what does breathing have to do with stress anyway?

As stress ravages your sympathetic nervous system, you get hit with autonomic symptoms like heightened blood pressure, quickened heart rate, and stopped up digestion. Breathing is another autonomic process affected by stress, but unlike its peers, it is the only one you can consciously control. This means it's both the whistleblower and the savior of a stressed out body and mind.

According to the Spire's science-backed algorithms, breathing slow and steady means you're calm; nimble but consistent puffs indicate focus; and erratically quaffing air betrays tension and stress. The Spire vibrates when it senses tension, reminding users to pause and correct their breath. Since

DETAILS:

BATTERY LIFE: 7 days

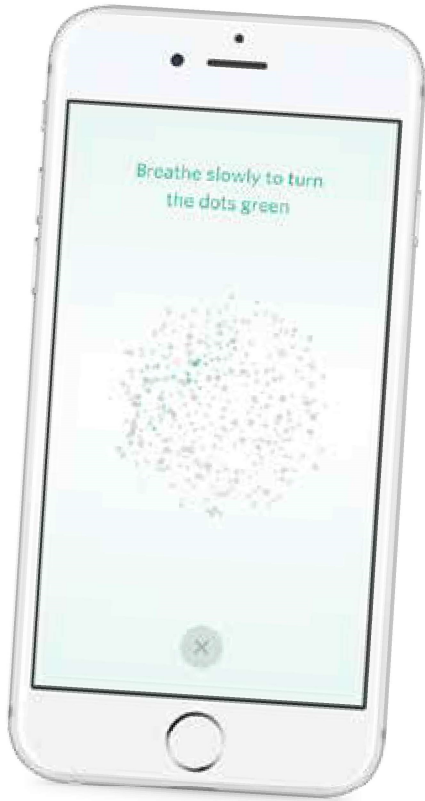
PLATFORM: iPhone and Android

PRICE: \$129.95

WEBSITE: SPIRE.IO

Imagine a line that undulates to the rhythm of your breath in real time. It arcs as you inhale and plunges as carbon dioxide flows from your lungs. Administer short punchy bursts of air, and it responds like a sidewinder twisting through the desert.

breathing is usually subconscious, I didn't always realize I was barely breathing until the Spire buzzed, and therein lies the brilliance of the device. It helped me nip bad habits in the bud before being overwhelmed by mental clutter. Soon I began noticing (and calming) shallow or hurried breath on



my own, even on days when I wasn't wearing the Spire.

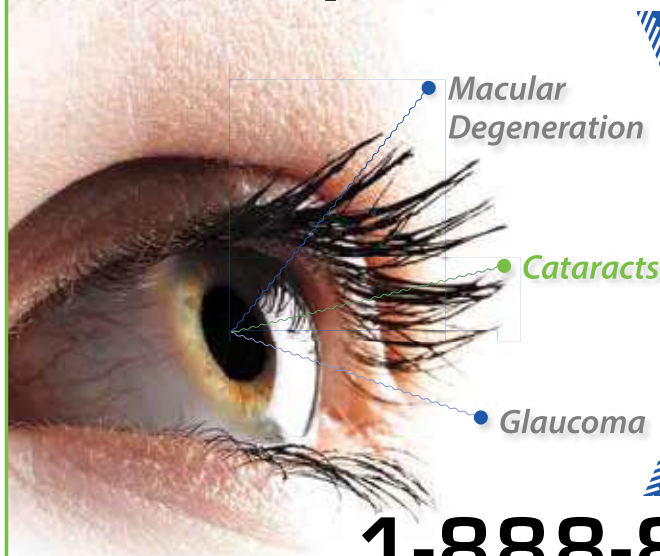
If you need an extra push to calm your breath, the app offers the Breath Guide. In it, a constellation of grey dots gently pulsates to the rise and fall of your diaphragm. Your goal is to get them to turn green as quickly as possible by breathing as slowly as possible. It's counterintuitive, which helps you focus on the breath and harness its stress-busting powers. The Spire app can also be configured to send push notifications reminding you to use the Breath Guide when your breathing gets tense or shallow.

There are a couple of niggles, though: Boosts—short meditations and instructionals designed to “boost” you toward your desired mindset—are an interesting sidebar to the Spire app, but they aren't included in the notification system or tied to your real-time breathwave. Some Boosts are voiced by mindfulness gurus Deepak Chopra and

Titch Naht Hanh, so it's unfortunate that they felt like an afterthought and there was little incentive to listen to them. And while the Spire tracks your steps, to call it a fullfledged activity tracker is a bit farfetched for me. Additionally, the Spire only holds 6 hours of data, essentially tethering you to your phone. But these small pain points don't stop the Spire from being a great mindfulness wearable.

Everyone who's reading this can obviously breathe. But learning to breathe properly is an invaluable lesson for those who suffer from chronic stress. That's why visualizing your breath in real time is so powerful—it brings conscious attention to the breath, which is prerequisite to controlling it and clearing the mind. The Spire can help tune your awareness of the breath and guide you back to emotional equilibrium by teaching you the oldest, cheapest, and most successful trick in the book.

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