

Zamzee



“Physical activity is the closest thing we have to a wonder drug.”

Dr. Tom Frieden
Director of the CDC

Technology That Kickstarts a Lifetime of Physical Activity

Rates of physical activity in the U.S. have declined by more than 30% since the 1960s, especially among children, and in the past three decades, childhood obesity rates have tripled. Research also shows an alarming link between sedentary behavior and obesity, chronic diseases including diabetes and heart disease, and negative impact on children’s psychological well-being and school performance. Technology—watching TV, playing video games, and other screen-time activities—is often part of the problem, but can technology be designed as part of the solution?

BEFORE YOU MOVE KIDS, UNDERSTAND THEM

HopeLab set out to design technology that gets kids moving. Here’s how we did it:

Connect the dots. In tackling the challenge, we wanted to both measure and motivate physical activity, enabling us to optimize the efficacy of our intervention. In a flash of insight, a HopeLab researcher had a great idea to combine an activity tracker with incentives and rewards for physical activity. If technology can reward kids by making sedentary behavior enjoyable, then technology can be designed to make physical activity fun and rewarding.

In a randomized, controlled study, Zamzee increased physical activity in children by 59%.

Make a ruckus. We immersed ourselves in the lives of a diverse group of American kids in a project we called Ruckus Research. Our goal: to find out what makes young people sedentary or active and what motivates them. Our findings yielded a set of behavioral profiles that illuminated why some kids are more active than others and helped us devise design principles for developing technology that can kickstart behavior change.

Build on what you know. Based on what we learned, we created Zamzee, a program that gives kids a wearable activity meter to measure their moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) and access to a fun, motivational digital platform that encourages kids and their families to move more.

Study and improve. We conducted randomized, controlled studies with more than 1,000 kids to inform design iterations that optimized the product experience. Through this science-driven design process, we improved Zamzee's impact on physical activity levels from a 30% increase in activity to nearly 60%. In our largest study, Zamzee also showed positive impacts on biomarkers related to type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Pilot with health care partners.

Inspired by the promising data, we collaborated with pediatric weight management programs through some of the nation's leading health care providers, insurance companies, and children's hospitals, and designed product features to give healthcare professionals access to real data about patients' activity levels. Results were tremendous: One program went from an average reduction in patients' percentage overweight from 3.4% to 7.7%; another increased program completion from 57% to 87%. Across the board, providers told us that more participants stuck with the program because they had fun.

"When the Zamzee came along, it was more fun to reach her goals. Because the prizes are so much better... Because it involves the computer. I guess that makes it more videogame-like than just having a piece of paper where you write down your goals."

– Zamzee Parent

Scale impact. To maximize Zamzee's impact, HopeLab worked with Welltok to make the product available to millions of children and their families. Zamzee is now part of Welltok's CaféWell Health Optimization Platform™, a groundbreaking offering that organizes the growing spectrum of health and condition management programs, apps, and digital tracking devices. This evolution of Zamzee is a powerful example of how HopeLab, as a philanthropic partner to healthcare businesses and providers, can bring innovations in health and well-being to children and families who need them most.

"I just started out and it's addictive. Zamzee, how do you do it? ...I know it's just for my health, but I'm an 11-year-old unstoppable machine."

– Zamzee User

Visit HopeLab.org/Ruckus-Research to learn more about the research behind Zamzee.



"Love my Zamzee because it helps me [get] better at exercising and when I go home I go on my computer and see how long I was walking and I can see how many points I have. This is why I love my Zamzee... It really helps. Thank you."

Zamzee User

"Seeing the positive reinforcement with Zamzee, at the weigh-in with the doctor and nurses... that was really wonderful."

Mother of a Zamzee User

"Zamzee raised the fun and engagement in our classes and clinic to a whole new level. I had parents competing for who could move the most, children sharing daily what they had done to be active, and everyone vying to earn more Pointz!"

Health Educator

Explore our work at HopeLab.org