# Three in five wearable users experience phantom notifications with growing anxiety



A startling reality is sending ripples through the tech world: three out of five wearable technology users now report experiencing "phantom notifications"—the sensation that their device vibrates or alerts them when nothing has actually happened. This growing phenomenon is raising alarms, as it correlates with heightened anxiety among users who increasingly rely on smartwatches and fitness trackers for health monitoring and connectivity.

The concept of phantom notifications has been likened to digital hallucinations, inducing a chronic state of alertness. Dr Maya Richards, a researcher in digital psychology, explains, “Your brain becomes conditioned to expect notifications, creating a feedback loop of checking behaviour that can significantly increase anxiety levels.” This phenomenon is particularly concerning as wearables become more integrated with advanced AI systems and personal health metrics, designed ostensibly to enhance user peace of mind yet paradoxically introducing new stressors.

Several factors contribute to the rise of these false alerts. The intricate interconnections between wearables and smartphones, alongside software bugs and update compatibility issues, exacerbate the situation. Additionally, increased sensor sensitivity in newer models combined with user dependency creates a heightened awareness of device sensations. Much like a car alarm that frequently triggers in error, the prevalence of phantom notifications can result in a boy-who-cried-wolf scenario; users’ trust in their devices erodes, yet they remain ever more vigilant out of fear of missing important alerts.

Jennifer Torres, a marketing executive and fitness tracker enthusiast, shares her experience candidly: “I started feeling phantom vibrations even when I wasn’t wearing my watch. Now I’m constantly checking my wrist, worried I might miss something important about my heart rate or an urgent message.” This illustrates a spiralling obsession that many users face, where the constant monitoring of health metrics leads to unhealthy fixation and anxiety.

Mental health experts advocate several strategies for mitigating notification-related anxiety. They suggest setting specific times to check devices rather than reacting instantaneously to each alert, and disabling non-essential notifications during periods of focus or rest. Regular digital detoxes, where users entirely remove their wearables, can also be beneficial. Customising vibration patterns to distinguish between critical and routine alerts can further help in reducing unnecessary stress.

Some manufacturers are beginning to acknowledge these issues, with innovative processing technologies being developed to create more sophisticated notification systems. New products, such as smart necklaces designed with specific functions—rather than constant alerts—are also emerging. Tech analyst Marcus Lee emphasises the importance of balance, stating, “The industry needs to balance connectivity with mental wellbeing. The next generation of wearables should include anxiety-reducing features that intelligently filter notifications based on genuine user priorities.”

This evolving relationship between humans and wearable technology presents a dual-edged sword; it resembles a dance that requires careful choreography. As we continue to navigate this technological landscape, the most valuable notification setting might just be one that reminds us to be present in our physical reality—where many of life’s meaningful alerts occur without the need for a vibrating wrist, seeking only our genuine, undivided attention.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/3-in-5-wearable-users-now-experience-phantom-notifications-and-anxiety/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/3-in-5-wearable-users-now-experience-phantom-notifications-and-anxiety/), [[2]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/am-i-dying/202409/how-wearable-technology-can-worsen-health-anxiety), [[6]](https://www.cybernews.com/gadgets/wearable-tech-health-monitoring-anxiety/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/how-wearable-tech-can-trigger-anxiety-and-how-to-manage-it), [[4]](https://news.unchealthcare.org/2024/07/wearable-devices-can-increase-health-anxiety-could-they-adversely-affect-health/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/3-in-5-wearable-users-now-experience-phantom-notifications-and-anxiety/), [[6]](https://www.cybernews.com/gadgets/wearable-tech-health-monitoring-anxiety/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/3-in-5-wearable-users-now-experience-phantom-notifications-and-anxiety/), [[7]](https://www.hitlab.org/mental-health-balance-pitfalls-wearables/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/3-in-5-wearable-users-now-experience-phantom-notifications-and-anxiety/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/am-i-dying/202409/how-wearable-technology-can-worsen-health-anxiety> - This article discusses how wearable devices, such as fitness trackers and smartwatches, can contribute to health anxiety. It highlights that constant monitoring of health metrics can lead to fixation and unhealthy obsession, potentially causing individuals to lose touch with the present moment and increasing anxiety about their health. The piece emphasizes the importance of reassessing the relationship with these devices to ensure they do not distract from other important areas of life.
3. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/how-wearable-tech-can-trigger-anxiety-and-how-to-manage-it> - This article examines the impact of wearable fitness trackers on anxiety levels. It notes that while these devices can promote increased physical activity and healthier lifestyles, they may also lead to anxiety due to constant data monitoring. Experts suggest strategies to manage this anxiety, such as adjusting notification settings, creating tech-free breaks, and reevaluating the relationship with the device to prevent obsessive tracking of health metrics.
4. <https://news.unchealthcare.org/2024/07/wearable-devices-can-increase-health-anxiety-could-they-adversely-affect-health/> - This study found that patients with atrial fibrillation who used wearable devices were more likely to be preoccupied with their heart symptoms and report concerns about their treatment compared to those without such devices. The study also noted that a significant proportion of wearable users experienced intense fear and anxiety in response to irregular rhythm notifications, leading to increased healthcare resource utilization. The researchers call for further studies to understand the effects of wearables on healthcare use and psychological well-being.
5. <https://www.mdpi.com/2079-6374/15/4/202> - This systematic review explores the use of wearable biosensors combined with artificial intelligence for mental health monitoring, particularly focusing on anxiety detection. It highlights that while wearable AI has the potential to detect anxiety, it is not yet advanced enough for clinical use. The review calls for further research to improve the performance of wearable AI in detecting anxiety and to differentiate types of anxiety, comparing the performance of different wearable devices.
6. <https://www.cybernews.com/gadgets/wearable-tech-health-monitoring-anxiety/> - This article discusses how wearable technology can contribute to health data anxiety. It highlights that while wearables can help monitor health, they can also lead to psychological stress due to constant tracking. The piece emphasizes the need for users to assess whether their devices are causing more stress and anxiety and suggests using wearables wisely, incorporating stress-reduction tips to enjoy their benefits without feeling too anxious.
7. <https://www.hitlab.org/mental-health-balance-pitfalls-wearables/> - This article examines the mental health implications of wearable technology, particularly focusing on how these devices can lead to anxiety. It discusses a study where a woman experienced anxiety due to constant notifications from her smartwatch, interpreting them as potential heart problems. The piece emphasizes the need for a balance between connectivity and mental well-being and suggests that future wearable technology should include features that intelligently filter notifications based on user priorities.