



Me and my data

London has become a hotbed for the Quantified Self movement – a fad for monitoring and analysing every tiny aspect of your personal physical and mental condition assisted by a raft of gadgets, apps and experts. **Matt Hussey** goes in search of the capital's data fiends

In the past 24 hours, I have sent 96 emails and received 135. I have eaten 2,647 calories, exercised for precisely one hour and six minutes, and slept for seven hours and 15 minutes. I have drunk 2.6 litres of water and 1.3 litres of beer, and maintained an average heart rate of 58 beats per minute.

Because of the 1.3 litres of beer, my sleep has been more fitful than normal and I drank 26 percent more caffeine the following day than I usually do.

Think that's more detail than you need to know? Then you're not a data junky – one of the growing band of Londoners dedicated to collating their calorie intake, heart rate, hours of sleep, mood changes, the state of their cells... in fact, everything they do and consume. But you might

be soon. Thanks to the gizmos we surround ourselves with, we're all creating more personal data than ever before, and have more ways of analysing it. British marketing firm ABI estimates that by the year 2018, 485 million wearable computing devices will be used worldwide. That's not to mention the deluge of smartphone apps that allow us to track sleep patterns, heart rate, diet and more. This is the age of the Quantified Self.

The QS movement has been powered by a mix of fitness freaks, technology evangelists, hackers and medical patients, many of them from the home of the fad, California. Some are running cultural experiments. Californian Chloe Fan has digitised every movie ticket she has bought since 2001, creating a picture of her filmgoing patterns, by day

of week, time of day, IMDB rating, price, location and who she was with. Personal development writer Tim Ferriss tracks his brainwaves while sleeping and constantly monitors his insulin levels. Quantifying has even reached the bedroom: Spreadsheets is an app that monitors total number of thrusts, duration and decibel peaks during sex. But is there such a thing as too much information, and what happens when we put our every movement under the microscope?

To find out, I arm myself with an arsenal of apps and wearable tech – including an Autographer: a camera that clips to the shirt and randomly takes photos and collects data on where the picture was taken. Then I embark on a month-long course of self-quantifying to find out.

MATT'S MONTHLY STATS	HEALTHY FOOD	Salads: 19		UNHEALTHY FOOD		Packets of Doritos: 11		Cheese panini: 1
		Veg portions: 7						
		Fruit: 29						

At the office, I begin the working day inputting data into Mappiness, a happiness mapping app from the London School of Economics, part of a project aiming to learn more about where, when and why people feel their best. Simultaneously Cardio, a heart-rate monitor that measures how light refracts off your face, prompts me to record today's reading.

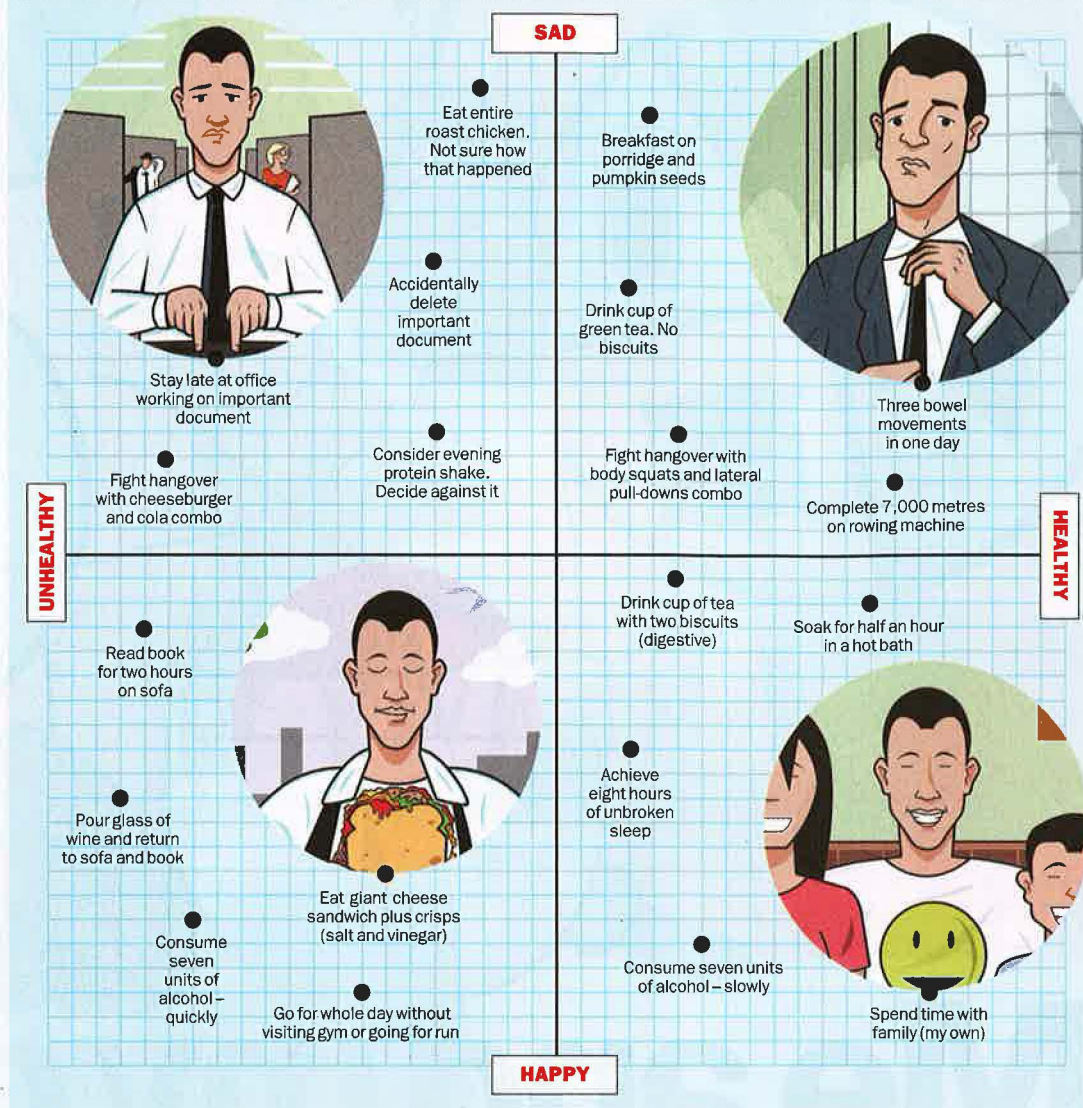
For the first week, I enjoy the attention the various apps are paying me, but I also realise that instead of speaking to people, I'm staring intently at my iPhone trying to tell it what I'm doing at that precise moment. Also, some of my neighbours are freaked out when they are auto-papped by my shirt camera. Despite these drawbacks, could QS have real health benefits?

I sign up for the London Quantified Self Meetup Group, which has more than 1,200 members, to see how London's hardcore life-loggers are spending their time. They meet at the Wayra Academy, an incubator for tech start-ups just off Tottenham Court Road, which seems an appropriate place for people to get excited over data. The group is run by Adriana Lukas, a 30-year-old Oxford-educated researcher. 'We had 30 people in the early days,' says Lukas, 'and I always arranged them in a circle for conversations.' There are now more than 100 attendees, eager to either show off their personal hacking skills or find out how other people are getting on.

At my first session, there are three talks: one from a man who is examining ways of training the brain with data; a PhD student looking to understand the sociology behind the Quantified Self movement; and a former neurosurgeon who manages depression by tracking her moods. This last possibility is the one that really excites me. Improving our health by better understanding the data our bodies create is something that Larry Smarr (yup, he's Californian), *doyen* of self-quantifying, is evangelical about.

When Smarr works out, an armband records skin temperature, heat flux, galvanic skin response and acceleration in three dimensions. At night, a headband monitors the pattern of his sleep every 30 seconds. He has his blood analysed eight times a year, tracking 100 separate signs of trouble. He sends his own poo to the lab nine times a year. Of course it's tempting to see such behaviour as a little obsessive, but Kenneth Cukier, the author of 'Big Data', says: 'It's not a bunch of weirdos. Today, we call it Quantified Self. Tomorrow we are going to call it health care. In the future, quantifying ourselves is going to be done not by some people but by all people.'

MATT'S HAPPINESS MATRIX



One app monitors thrusts, duration and decibel peaks during sex

But will I be around to see the future? Can this measurement stuff actually predict my lifespan? I contact Life Length, a Spanish biotech company, for a test to measure a small component in my chromosomes that helps the cells function properly. These readings should give a deep-level indication of the shape my body is in. The test is scheduled for my thirtieth birthday; cue thoughts of impending middle age, hair loss and falling asleep before 10pm in front of the TV. At a private clinic in Harley Street, two nurses extract blood to be sent off to a lab in Madrid for analysis. 'It's not a diagnosis but an indicator of probability,' explains Steve Matlin, CEO of Life Length. The test, which was developed by five Nobel Prize winners, is part of the next generation of health care, helping us maintain our bodies rather than wait for things to go wrong. 'You take your car in for a service every 20,000 miles to check for problems,' explains Smarr. 'What you don't do is wait for smoke to be pouring

out of the bonnet before seeing a mechanic. At the moment, medicine is focused on waiting till you're sick. But that's changing, thanks to data.'

Clearly, self-measuring could have big health benefits. For me, however, the act of aimlessly recording information on calories, emails and trips to the toilet meant I lost interest as the weeks went by. Some days I'd forget to input what I'd eaten or turn my sleeping app on at night. 'People tend to lose interest in the process of recording data after around three months,' says Lukas. 'If there's no purpose to the data, it's just data for data's sake.'

Still, my analysis did teach me some things I didn't know: I'm happiest on Wednesdays, after 10pm and with friends. My heart rate is higher at work than at home, and for every hour less in bed I spend, I drink twice as much coffee and eat 700 extra calories a day. But best is the call I take from Steve Matlin when my test results come back. 'Your biological age,' Matlin announces, 'is a healthy 27.1 years.' Thanks to Quantified Self, I'm 2.9 years younger than I thought I was.

For more info on the London Quantified Self Meetup Group see www.meetup.com/londonQS

MY MONTHLY STATS

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Glasses of wine: 9
Pints: 16
Double whiskies, neat: 6



TOILET VISITS

Number one
Four times a day (sober)
six times a day (if alcohol is drunk the night before)



Number two
Three times a day (sober)
two times a day (if alcohol is drunk the night before)