ZDNET # 8 times the Apple Watch predicted danger and saved lives in 2024

Wearables continued to rise in popularity this year, with Apple's devices proving to be lifesaving in these harrowing true stories.

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Wearables are becoming an increasingly popular way to monitor your health. Smart rings like Oura can detect changes in vital signs that might indicate sickness, and smartwatches, including the Apple Watch and Samsung Galaxy Watch, can identify sleep apnea. AirPods can now test your hearing; even irregular menstruation data collected by fitness bands can reveal early signs of bigger health issues.

But in some cases, wearables go beyond routine health monitoring to save users' lives. A 2023 study found that smartwatches are highly accurate when it comes to detecting arrhythmias. Through heart rate, emergency, and fall detection features, the Apple Watch helped several people in dire situations in 2024.

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Here are eight instances where the Apple Watch detected critical information in the nick of time.

1. Unlikely heart failure

Memphis-based Kamron Jones' Apple Watch frequently sent him alerts indicating his heart rate was abnormally high, which eventually prompted him to visit the hospital. At the time, he had assumed he was feeling low-energy due to a recent case of pneumonia. But after several tests, doctors determined he was experiencing heart failure.

At only 22, Jones didn't expect the diagnosis and wouldn't have considered it possible without his Apple Watch. Jones told Fox 13 that he would have ignored his

mild symptoms if not for the watch's notifications -- at which point it may have been too late to get the help he needed.

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2. Surprise heart issue

Frank Haggerty's Apple Watch SE sounded an alarm when he was asleep, warning him that his heart rate was around 30 beats per minute -- much lower than the normal range of 60 to 100 (when sleeping, heart rate usually doesn't drop below 40 or 50).

Despite feeling fine, he was rushed to the emergency room, where a doctor found he had a "complete heart block," or an electrical system malfunction of the heart, according to cardiologist Dr. Keith Wolfson. Haggerty didn't know he had a heart issue and wasn't experiencing any symptoms at the hospital, which shocked his doctors.

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"Quite frankly, had I not had the watch on, I wouldn't be sitting here today," he told CBS. "It's my best friend, I say that in front of my wife."

3. Carbon monoxide poisoning

But Apple Watches don't just catch heart issues -- they can also provide emergency care. Natalie Nasatka, a Delaware student, experienced a carbon monoxide leak in her apartment that rendered her unconscious. The gas is especially dangerous as it is odorless, colorless, and flavorless, making it almost impossible to identify without a carbon monoxide detector.

Nasatka told CBS that as she was fading, she hit the SOS button on her Apple Watch, which dialed 911. She woke up to firefighters entering her apartment, who were able to confirm the leak with their own detectors. Had she not been able to quickly contact emergency help, she may not have survived.

Learn more about the warning signs of carbon monoxide poisoning and ensure you have a proper detector in place by reviewing the CDC guidelines.

4. Stuck at sea

Australian surfer Rick Shearman was caught up in rough seas off the coast of Byron Bay, treading water more than half a mile from shore. Unable to see his partner on the beach, he used the SOS emergency call on his Apple Watch Ultra. Through his watch, he was able to speak to emergency services via 000, Australia's 911 equivalent, and direct a rescue helicopter to his location as he was getting pulled further out to sea.

"If it wasn't for being able to access that service in my watch, I'd probably be bobbing out somewhere in international waters by now," he told ABC North Coast.

5. Mid-flight alarm

Gary Smith's Apple Watch acted up on a flight home to Nashville. As he told the Independent, Smith hadn't been feeling well recently and was often fatigued and out of breath, but doctors had only told him to keep an eye on his symptoms -- not that he was in any immediate danger. As he tried to rest on the flight, his Apple Watch warned him that his heart rate was fluctuating.

Smith had been skeptical of the accuracy of the watch's heart-monitoring features, thinking of them as more of a "gimmick." He assumed the watch was malfunctioning.

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But once he got home, he ended up in emergency treatment and was told he needed an angiogram to diagnose his heart's activity. After that, his symptoms worsened; he was going cold and losing his vision in spurts. His watch continued to identify an irregular rhythm, which an electrocardiogram (ECG) had also confirmed.

Ultimately, Smith got a pacemaker -- which also conveniently syncs with his Apple devices.

6. Irregular heartbeat

On his way to the airport, Peter Moore felt lightheaded. The Apple Watch wearer's phone pinged with a "low heart rate" warning, saying his heart rate had dropped to 32.

"It was insistent in its notifications that something wasn't right," Moore told KTLA. When he got to the hospital, his doctors were alarmed and immediately told him he needed a pacemaker.

"His watch had a big role in saving his life," Moore's cardiac electrophysiologist, Omid Yousefian, told KTLA. Like many other physicians, he advised that wearables are ideal for tracking signs like heart rate, but that they aren't equipped to detect larger events like heart attacks.

7. Not exactly a panic attack

In another case of atrial fibrillation (AFib), Delhi-based Sneha Saha felt her heart rate accelerate one evening, thinking she was having a panic attack. But when slowing her breathing didn't help, she put on her Apple Watch 7 to see if it could offer any insights.

The wearable immediately advised her to see a doctor, which she initially ignored, but followed through when her heart rate continued to drop later in the evening.

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"I would not have gone to the hospital and would have lost my life if the Apple Watch had not alerted me of the serious condition around midnight," Saha told Times of India. "Everything I had to tell the doctors was based on Apple Watch readings."

8. A freak bike accident

Riding a Citi Bike home in the rain in New York City, Eric Zollinger hit what he told the New York Post was an "8 inch deep" pothole full of water. He flew off his bike and onto the sidewalk. Though he made it home okay, he then experienced a serious nosebleed as a result of the crash that left him dizzy and caused him to faint in his bathroom, where he hit the side of the tub as he collapsed.

That triggered his Apple Watch's automatic fall detection feature. When he woke up, he heard a 911 operator speaking to him from his wrist.

"I don't know how things would have gone for me if the watch hadn't alerted me," Zollinger said.

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