

DISCOVERIES



PRODUCT

Track your progress

The brand-new **BodyMedia Fit Core Armband** claims to take workouts and weight loss to the next level by tracking calories burned, steps taken, physical activity levels and even sleep. The device uses four sensors to capture data and will mesh with the Internet-based Activity Manager, which lets users set exercise goals and log daily food intake. The armband costs \$179.99 and is available at www.bodymedia.com.

CARDIOLOGY

A shock to the heart

There may be a gentler way to control irregular heartbeats than the commonly used shock of defibrillation. In a recent study in the journal *Science Translational Medicine*, researchers showed that high-frequency alternating currents can stop irregular heartbeats in mice, rabbits and pigs. At high rates around 200 Hertz, the alternating current — which was once used at a different rate to electrocute people — freezes all the

heart cells in a state halfway between excitement and relaxation. When the current shuts off, the cells reset back to their normal rhythm. That may be a less-painful alternative to the standard high-voltage shocks.

END OF LIFE

Planning for the end

Patients who talk with their doctors about their end-of-life care and have an advance directive have the same survival rates as patients who don't, according to a new study in the *Journal of Hospital Medicine*. Researchers looked at 356 patients at three different hospitals who had low or medium risks of dying within one year and followed them from 2003 to 2009. By the end of the study, there were no survival differences for those who had end-of-life talks or living wills. That's reassuring, the authors said, because some people fear that having those talks with doctors will shorten life span.

WEBSITE OF THE WEEK

► www.nclnet.org/technology — Parents and kids can get information from the National Consumers League about safety issues involving tweens and cellphones.

COMING UP

► **WALK FOR ALS** — The Sixth Annual Birmingham Walk to Defeat ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, will be Oct. 8 at Vestavia Hills High School. Registration begins at 9 a.m. and the walk starts at 11 a.m. For more information, go to www.alsa.org and click on "find a walk near you."