Fitbit debuts $200 Versa 2 smartwatch, Fitbit Premium subscription service

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- The new Fitbit Versa 2 smartwatch.
- The Versa 2 takes the design of the original Versa and adds more features to it, like voice commands and NFC.
- The Versa 2 has Amazon Alexa support, so you can ask it questions and it will show text-based responses on its screen.
- All Versa 2 models have NFC for Fitbit Pay now as well.

Fitbit's Versa smartwatch was such a big hit that the company created the Versa Lite for athletes who wanted the same look in a more affordable device. Now, Fitbit is revamping the original Versa with the introduction of the Versa 2, the second generation of the all-purpose smartwatch. The Versa 2 will have the same price as the original Versa did—$200—and it will have a Special Edition version that comes with two bands for $230.

The Versa 2 doesn't change much about the exterior design of the smartwatch. That's one of the things users reportedly like most about the Versa: it's practical yet chameleonic in its attractiveness. So Fitbit left that aspect of the watch untouched. The company improved the screen, though, by making

it slightly larger and introducing an optional, always-on mode. So if you choose to use this mode, you won't have to wait for the screen to turn from black to your clock face whenever you want to check the time.

To support such a feature, Fitbit had to increase the Versa 2's battery life. The company claims the new battery, like its predecessor, will still get at least five days of life while tracking activity and sleep. But users will probably not notice a huge jump in days of life between the Versa 2 and the original Versa.

The Versa 2 also has a faster processor than the previous model, and all Versa 2 devices have NFC support, allowing users to pay contactlessly using Fitbit Pay. NFC was previously only available on the original Versa Special Edition, and we're glad to see Fitbit bring it to the Versa 2. NFC isn't necessary for everyone even as contactless payments have gotten more popular in recent years, so when the original Versa debuted about two years ago, Fitbit's decision to make it an optional feature made sense. But now Fitbit faces steeper competition from Apple, Garmin, Samsung, and the like, and many of the Versa's direct smartwatch competitors include NFC without forcing customers to pay more for it.

Another feature that many smartwatches have is support for voice commands, and now Fitbit has that, too. The Versa 2 comes with Amazon Alexa support, allowing users to ask Alexa for information like the caloric stats for a certain food or where the nearest gym is. While users speak commands and questions to Alexa, the Versa 2 will show text responses on its screen, so your watch won't talk back to you. In most cases, that's a good thing, but some may be disappointed that the integration isn't more like Siri on the Apple Watch, which both speaks answers and shows text answers.

In addition to all of that, the Versa 2 will do everything the original Versa did, including track daily activity and sleep,

record workouts using SmartTrack, map outdoor workouts using connected GPS, deliver smartphone alerts, run Fitbit OS applications, and more. A new feature also allows users to control Spotify music playback, but the Versa 2 doesn't support onboard music storage.

Users who invested in a Fitbit device for the company's solid sleep-tracking features will be excited to hear that Fitbit is finally bringing Sleep Score to all of its heart-rate monitoring devices, too, including the Versa 2. The company was testing this feature in beta for quite some time, but heart-rate monitoring will soon roll out to all users. The feature will give users a single numeric score that represents how well they slept the night before based on heart-rate data, restlessness, time awake, and time spent in sleep stages.

The Versa 2 appears to be a solid upgrade to the original Versa, and the fact that it costs $200 is a huge perk. Fitbit could have easily raised the price of the new version, but keeping it at $200 will not only draw in new customers—it could encourage current Versa lovers to upgrade their devices.

Fitbit gets serious about subscriptions

But Fitbit isn't just focusing on new devices. Considering how competitive the wearable market is, the company cannot afford to put all its eggs in the hardware basket.

Fitbit's newest idea comes in the form of a new health and fitness subscription plan dubbed Fitbit Premium. This $9.99-per-month service gives users personalized insights, guided health programs and workouts, and other perks that are designed to help them live healthier lives.

- The Get Active guided program in the new Fitbit Premium.
- Examples of personalized insights from Fitbit Premium.

- The new Sleep Score in the Fitbit app.

The service absorbs and adds to Fitbit Coach, the company's previous service that provided guided health plans and workouts to subscribers. Fitbit Premium will include Fitbit Coach's previous guided plans and workouts, allowing members to take part in health plans that are designed to help them lose weight or improve their sleep schedules, as well as follow audio- and video-based workout routines wherever and whenever they want.

Fitbit Premium users will also get personalized insights and health tips based on the activity and sleep they capture with their Fitbit devices. Currently, all Fitbit users see info cards in the Fitbit mobile app that have generalized health advice that the app serves up based on collected data. But Fitbit claims that this feature for Premium users will go deeper and provide even more personalized insights. We didn't get too many examples of this when briefed, but we hope that these insights go further than just spitting out calculated numbers such as how much you moved this week versus last week or how your resting heart rate changed from day to day.

Fitbit Premium will also include wellness reports that users can share with their doctors, new content from partners including Headspace and Yoga Studio, and health coaching that connects them to an actual health coach for an additional fee (that feature is forthcoming).

There's clearly a lot more to Fitbit Premium than the personalized health insights and advice, and that feature could make or break this subscription service. Fitbit is entering yet another space (the health-service subscription market) where competition is fierce, but the company has a treasure-trove of data for each user that most of its competitors lack. Fitbit just has to put that intel to good use. I'm anxious to try out Fitbit Premium to see just how much deeper these personalized insights go toward helping an

individual user increase their overall health.

Starting today on Fitbit’s website, the Fitbit Versa 2 is available for $199, while the Special Edition (which includes an extra band) is available for $229. Both devices will be more widely available in stores and online starting September 15. Fitbit Premium will start rolling out in September for $9.99 per month or $79.99 per year in 17 countries, with plans to expand into more markets in 2020.

Listing image by Fitbit

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