



Our Own Devices: The Past and Future of Body Technology

Edward Tenner

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From the author of **Why Things Bite Back**— which introduced us to the revenge antics of technology—**Our Own Devices** is a wonderfully revealing look at the inventions of everyday things that protect us, position us, or enhance our performance.

In helping and hurting us, these body technologies have produced consequences that their makers never intended:

- In postwar Japan traditional sandals gave way to Western-style shoes because they were considered marks of a higher standard of living, but they seriously increased the rate of fungal foot ailments.
- Reclining chairs, originally promoted for healthful brief relaxation, became symbols of the sedentary life and obesity.
- A keyboard that made the piano easier to learn failed in the marketplace mainly because professional pianists believed difficult passages needed to stay difficult.
- Helmets, reintroduced during the carnage of World War I, saved the lives of countless civilian miners, construction workers, and, more recently, bicyclists.

Once we step on the treadmill of progress, it's hard to step off. Yet Edward Tenner shows that human ingenuity can be applied in self-preservation as well, and he sheds light on the ways in which the users of commonplace technology surprise designers and engineers, as when early typists developed the touch method still employed on today's keyboards. And he offers concrete advice for reaping benefits from the devices that we no longer seem able to live without. Although dependent on these objects, we can also use them to liberate ourselves. This delightful and instructive history of invention shows why National Public Radio dubbed Tenner "the philosopher of everyday technology."

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