Check-up while spending a penny

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JAPAN’S famously hi-tech toilets, which frighten foreign visitors with their range of buttons, have never stopped evolving, and now the call of nature can turn into a medical check-up.

For those who want to stay healthy or take bathroom humour to a new dimension, the Intelligence Toilet comes with a tiny cup that tests urine and devices to keep track of blood pressure, weight and fat.

It is the latest innovation for Japanese toilets, which commonly transform into a bidet or offer amenities such as adjustable seat temperature and air fans.

Japan’s largest toilet maker, Toto, designed the toilet with house builder Daiwa House Industry.

According to Daiwa House spokesman Miki Chino, when the company chairman was in hospital some years ago, he saw many people coming in to have tests and returning home with lots of medicine.

"It made him want to build a house that could give you health checks," Chino says.

A top-of-the-line time on the can does not come cheap, as the toilet costs between Y380,000 ($4520) and Y562,000 more than a basic pan.

Chino says about 100 people have bought the Intelligence Toilet, which can only be sold as part of a new or remodelled house.

As one sits on Intelligence Toilet, it extends a little cup from the rim to take five cubic centimetres of urine, which is sent through a metal tube to a hidden sensor to measure sugar levels. For those who fear the device may be unhygienic, the makers say the cup is cleaned automatically after the test.

While awaiting results, you can pop open a built-in box next to the toilet paper, take out a velcro strap, wrap it around your wrist and check your blood pressure.

Also on offer is a scale under the floor and two little bars above a washstand that measure your body fat.

All test results are displayed on a single panel and fed into a personal computer.

Each toilet experience begins by pressing a button A, B, C or D to log into your track record, with the option of blocking other users from seeing your data.

"Our original idea was to have the mother adjust dining menus in accordance with the health of her family," Chino says.

There is also a fifth button that for guests who want an impromptu health check as well as attending to other business.

Toto grew to dominate the Japanese lavatory market after starting out in the late 1970s, just as Western-style toilets began outnumbering the traditional Japanese squat model.

The Washlet, with its range of buttons, was launched in 1980, expanding on a device for aged and handicapped people made by a small US company.

Toto bought the patent from the US company in 1968 and spent years to find the right angle, temperature and strength of water jets for Japanese customers.
The Japanese company has sold more than 20 million Washlet toilets since 1980.

Its latest line of toilet has a "tornado" flush that cleans the entire basin with a whirlpool effect, as well as a "wonder-wave wash" of machinegun shots of minute water balls. Besides a deodorant to clear up unwelcome whiffs, the new Washlet is fitted with "auto-fragrance", which automatically spreads an aroma of your choice as you sit on the toilet.

/Agence France-Presse/

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