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# FOOTBALL FANS IN TRAINING

## FFIT DELIVERY 1 REPORT

### FFIT PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH PARTNERS



## Background

Scotland has a poor track record in male obesity: 26.8% are obese, a further 39.5% are overweight, and male obesity is forecast to rise at a faster rate than female obesity over the next 40 years. Excess body weight is associated with long-term health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, some cancers (e.g. bowel cancer) and premature death.

A 5-10% weight loss can significantly reduce risk of ill health, but very few men join existing commercial and NHS weight management programmes. This reluctance may reflect the view that 'real men don't diet' and may prefer using physical activity as a weight management technique.

With growing recognition that the professional sports club 'brand' can be used to encourage men to engage in health improvement programmes, the SPL Trust, in partnership with leading experts in nutrition, physical activity and men's health from four universities and the NHS, has developed Football Fans in Training (FFIT), a weight management, physical activity and healthy-living programme designed to be delivered by SPL community coaches to male supporters aged 35-65 years.

FFIT is a gender-sensitised, evidenced-based, 12-week programme delivered to men-only groups in SPL club stadia. It has three aims:

## Football Fans in Training - the programme

1. To achieve a 5-10% weight loss through changing eating habits (in particular portion size and healthy eating).



2. To achieve 45 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week; starting with an individualised pedometer-based walking programme and moving onto more vigorous activity through an introduction to local community facilities. Daily homework is supplemented by weekly coach-led training at club stadia.

3. To use effective behavioural change techniques, including self-monitoring of weight and physical activity, and S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-Limited) goal-setting to ensure that changes are sustained in the long term.

## Did FFIT work?

FFIT was delivered by community coaches at 11 SPL clubs throughout Scotland between September and December 2010. Men were eligible if they were aged 35-65 years and had a body mass index (BMI) of at least 27 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and/or a waist circumference of at least 100 cm.

Measurements: 1) Coaches at all clubs recorded weekly attendance, and pre- and post-programme weight and waist circumference. 2) Independent measures, including blood pressure, eating habits, alcohol consumption, self-reported physical activity and psychological outcomes were conducted at 2 clubs, Hearts and Kilmarnock. There was also a 'waiting list comparison' group at Hearts and Kilmarnock who started the programme in January 2011.

### Recruitment

- **355 men were enrolled** on FFIT in September 2010 (including 52 men who formed the waiting list comparison groups at Hearts and Kilmarnock).
- FFIT attracted men who were **at high risk of ill health**
  - ⇒ Average BMI across all 11 clubs was 34.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>
  - ⇒ Independent measures at Hearts and Kilmarnock showed that most men had, or were at risk of developing, high blood pressure.
- FFIT attracted men from **across the socioeconomic spectrum**.
- The football club 'brand' was crucial.



**Kilmarnock FFIT participant:** *I had started to put on a bit of weight and I was getting lazy, and I thought "Right, I need to do something". And when this came up I thought, "ideal". Because of the link to Kilmarnock FC, obviously I knew the other guys would be in the same sort of position as me. So that was probably one of the biggest selling points of it.*

### Attendance

- Weekly attendance **remained high** throughout the programme.
- **Three quarters completed the course**, despite appalling weather in December.
- Men who dropped out had good reason (e.g. illness, changing work commitments).
- Men kept coming because they enjoyed it.



**St Mirren FFIT Participant:** *Great bunch of guys, coaches on the ball and made losing weight and inches fun.*

## Weight loss

- Men who completed FFIT **lost a significant amount of weight** (Figure 1).

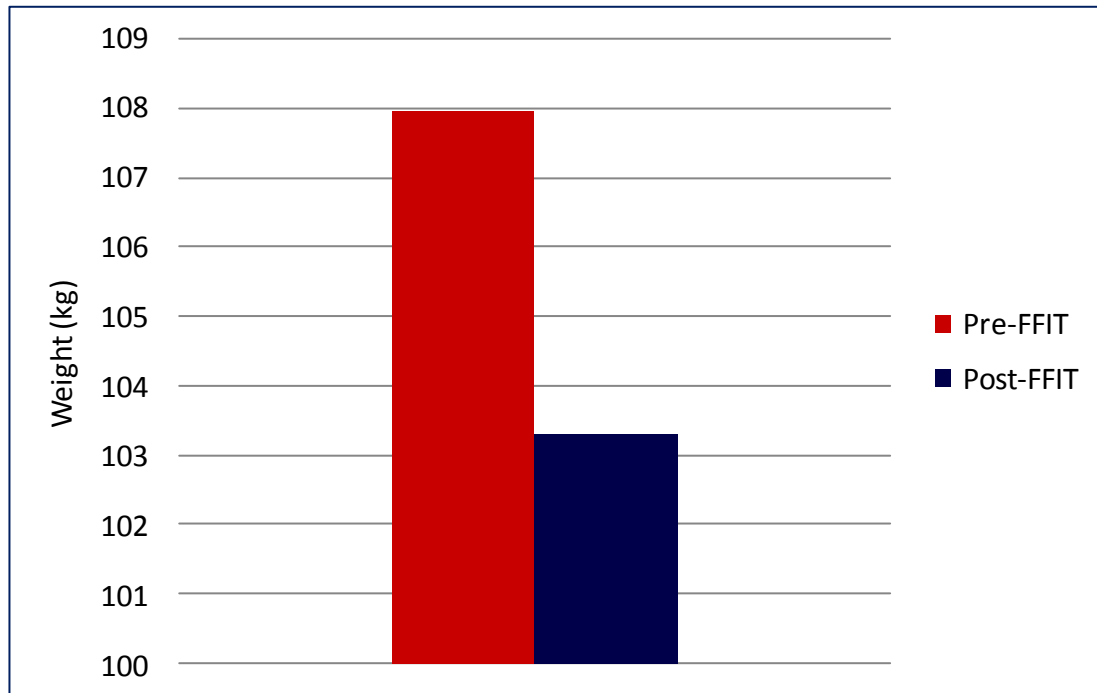


Figure 1 Mean before and after weight of FFIT participants across 11 SPL clubs

- Men **lost an average of 4.9% of their start weight** whilst attending FFIT.
- All in all, men who completed FFIT lost a total of 1,202 kg in weight and 1,142 cm around their waists.
- Men in the waiting list comparison groups at Hearts and Kilmarnock did not show any reduction in weight or waist circumference.

**Celtic FFIT participant:** *The course itself was fantastic as well as the venue for it and this gave me the motivation to do well on the course. Having people who were on the course for the same reasons as me was also a good thing as we all worked off each other. I lost just under a stone in my time on the course and would recommend it to anyone.*



## What else did FFIT do?

### A healthier, more balanced diet

Men at Hearts and Kilmarnock who completed FFIT made significant improvements to their eating habits. Validated questionnaires showed they were eating:

- More fruit and vegetables
- Breakfast more regularly
- Fewer burgers
- Fewer pies
- Fewer biscuits
- Fewer crisps
- Less chocolate



Participants also reported a significant reduction in beer consumption.

Men in the waiting list comparison groups did not report any change to their eating habits or alcohol consumption.

**Hearts FFIT Participant:** *It's cutting out the rubbish and replacing it with the good stuff. I mean I've stopped eating crisps, I used to have two or three bags of crisps a week. I've started buying a pineapple every week and I leave it for a couple of days, just to let it go a wee bit softer, and I cut it up and I have pineapple at night time. If I'm just sitting on the couch and I think "Right, something sweet after my dinner? Right, I've got that pineapple". It cuts out the biscuits, the chocolate sweeties, the crisps. And again the portion control as well, I mean you can eat as much fruit and veg as you want. I've started putting veg on my plate first and then going to the meat side of things.*

### More active

Men completing FFIT at Hearts and Kilmarnock reported a significant increase in their daily physical activity. They also rated themselves as fitter than when they started FFIT. These changes were not reported by men on the waiting list.

**Kilmarnock FFIT participant:** *I certainly found the difference with the walking as I was increasing the steps every week. When I was going up hills to start with I was getting out of breath and struggling with some of the higher hills. But at the other end of the programme I wasn't finding any problems, you know. I was walking a lot more, certainly, and I was certainly going faster going round the kind of circuit I go on. So it certainly benefited me directly that way, fitness-wise and stamina-wise.*





## Improvements in health and wellbeing

- **Blood pressure:** Systolic blood pressure was significantly reduced amongst men completing FFIT at Hearts and Kilmarnock.
- **Health-related quality of life:** Participants at Hearts and Kilmarnock scored significantly higher on a validated measure of health-related quality of life (SF12) on completion of FFIT than they had at the start of the programme.
- **Self-esteem:** Self-esteem increased significantly amongst men completing FFIT at Hearts and Kilmarnock.
- There were no significant changes in blood pressure, health-related quality of life or self-esteem in men in the waiting list comparison groups.

## Draw of the football club

The SPL club setting and club-based incentives were major motivators for men not only joining, but also continuing to attend and complete, FFIT.

**St Mirren FFIT participant:** *It was all a bit Weight Watchers like for the first 5 minutes, and I think if it wasn't St Mirren and it wasn't the FFIT programme I might have been tempted to just bail at that point. But the fact that it's your club, you tend to stick it out that wee bit longer, and I'm delighted that I did 'cos it has made a hell of a difference.*

**Celtic FFIT participant:** *Being a Celtic fan walking through the front door of Celtic Park every week gave me the motivation to come back week on week.*

Ibrox legend Mark Hately celebrates success with participants at **Rangers FFIT.**



**Dundee United FFIT participant:** *I enjoyed in particular the link with the club and the opportunity to do the exercise running the steps in the George Fox stand.*



**Hibernian FFIT participant:** *The main motivation is that it is linked to Hibernian FC and you feel part of the club. Glory, glory to the Hibeese!*



## Personal experiences

### **Alistair Brown Kilmarnock FFIT age 58 years Lost 7kg (6.2% of start weight)**

My weight had been creeping up and up, and I tried to tie my laces one day and I nearly killed myself. A medical check through work had recommended a council-run programme to me, but I just didn't fancy it. Killie FFIT ticked all the boxes. It wasn't a diet class and it was all guys with the same interests - all jelly bellies and fans of Kilmarnock FC.



One of the things that struck me was I was eating no fruit at all. So now, instead of having a roll and bacon or a roll and sausage at work, I'll have an apple. So that's just one wee thing, but that's seven rolls and bacon I'm not having. The programme made me think maybe I can do things a wee bit differently; you know, walk instead of taking the car. Our work is five storeys and there's two wings, so what I do is walk up both of them, twice a day. When I used to have to go up them in a hurry by the time I got to the third floor you could just scrape me up, but now I find I can get to the top in both no bother. Our group at Kilmarnock are meeting ourselves once a week at the local gym. I'm still doing my walking and I am eating far less junk, but there's still a lot of scope to improve, so hopefully I'll carry on taking it that wee bit further every week.

### **Charles Smith Hearts FFIT age 55 years Lost 12.8 kg (8.8% of start weight)**

I'd battled my weight for years with some success when I was younger, but in the last 3 years I'd let myself get to the worst I have ever been. My son died of leukaemia in 2008 and, having always been into comfort eating, I just saw my weight rise and rise to the point where I didn't believe I could get the better of it any more. A friend told me about Hearts FFIT and I thought "Well, okay I'll give it a go", because of the link with Hearts FC, the fact that it was all men, and we were all in the same boat weight and fitness wise.

I always said I ate all the right things, but I ate all the wrong things as well, and I've managed for most part to cut out the wrong things and also to eat less of the good things. It's just getting that first step on the ladder, thinking "Oh I've lost a few pounds, I can do this". I'm walking further now than ever before, but there has got to be purpose to it for me, so I walk to every home game, it's an hour and a quarter each way and that's including over Corstorphine Hill on the way back.



It becomes second nature, you get to know without thinking too hard what you should and shouldn't eat, and how far you need to walk on a daily basis. I've signed up for the Maggie Monster Bike and Hike in Fort William next month. You do a 30 mile cycle followed by an 8 mile hike. If you had told me this time last year I would be doing something like this now, I would have said you were completely nuts!



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### Programme delivery

The coaches and community departments at the 11 participating SPL clubs:

Celtic



Hibernian



Motherwell



Dundee United



Inverness Caledonian Thistle



Rangers



Hamilton



Kilmarnock



St Johnstone



Hearts



St Mirren



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