

# Using loyalty to football clubs to get men aged 30-65 years more active

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Researchers in the UK, Portugal, Norway and the Netherlands are working with 15 European professional football clubs in their countries to try and engage more men aged 30-65 years to sit less and move more. Details of the study, led by Professor Sally Wyke, University of Glasgow, UK, will be presented at this year's European Congress on Obesity in Porto, Portugal by Dr Marlene Nunes Silva, University of Lisbon, Portugal.

Achieving sustained health [behaviour change](#) remains a challenge, and some groups hard to engage, including men aged 30-65 years. Advancing the science of behaviour change requires a good understanding of how interventions are informed by theory and how they can better test it. The development of the European Fans in Training (EuroFIT) program was based on sociological and motivational theory (in this case, loyalty to their local football club) to engage male football supporters in four European countries in initiating and maintaining improvements in [physical activity](#), sedentary, and dietary behaviours. The project is funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration.

EuroFIT tests the utility of a culturally- and gender-sensitised lifestyle program in about 1200 middle-aged (30-65 years) men working across 15 football clubs in Portugal, Norway, the Netherlands, and the UK. The clubs are Manchester City, Arsenal, Everton, Stoke City, and Newcastle United (UK); Benfica, Sporting Lisbon and FC Porto (Portugal); PSV Eindhoven, FC Groningen, Vitesse, and Ado Den Hag (Netherlands);

and Stromsgodset IF, Valerenga Fotball and Rosenborg Ballklub (Norway).

Men participate in a 12-week behaviour change program, taking place in their football clubs and led by club coaches. Men are given a toolbox of techniques for behavior change and the programme is taught interactively so that they can learn from, and support, one another. There are a wide variety of activities including walking football, challenge-style activities, strength training and tips to avoid injury. The strong affiliation and loyalty to clubs are leveraged to increase relatedness and personal interest in the program, with each club assigning a Eurofit Ambassador who is a player, former player or coach. In Portugal, Nuno Gomes and Nene performed this role for Benfica; and Augusto Inacio as former coach of Sporting Lisbon, and Semedo, a former Porto player. Ambassadors participate in at least two sessions.

Participants self-monitor levels of activity using newly developed technology (the SitFIT) which allows men to self-monitor how much they are sitting down as well as their participants' daily step count. This and other data can be uploaded to the user's and researchers' own desktop computers and the data can be used to play a team-based walking game called MatchFIT.

The EuroFIT intervention is currently being evaluated in a randomised controlled trial in the 15 participating clubs. Alongside other perspectives (e.g., from sociology and gender studies), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Achievement Goal Theory are integral components of the core intervention and measurement protocol. Specifically, the program is designed to help men develop autonomous (self-determined) goals, gradually build competencies through optimally challenging physical activity and dietary changes, and strengthen relationships through meaningful connections to group members and the [club](#).

As well as the randomised controlled trial (with early results expected in summer 2017 when the football season is over in all four countries) the researchers are also looking at ways to ensure the benefits to participants are sustainable and able to be repeated in other clubs, as well expanding access to women, younger men and families. Early indications are that the retention rate of participants across the 15 clubs is over 90%.

Provided by European Association for the Study of Obesity

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