

# Edinburgh family improve fitness with the Healthy Happy Hearts challenge



## *Omega-3 challenge makes Edinburgh family fitter*

**Healthy Happy Hearts challenge delivered through Fish is the Dish by Seafish proves that oil-rich-fish can help improve health and fitness for the whole family**

The health benefits of oil rich fish have been widely publicised in over 3,000 research papers, but evidence shows that most of the UK aren't eating enough of this nutritious fish to fully benefit. Spurred on by this information, one family from Edinburgh recently learned first-hand the importance of including seafood in their diet twice a week every week. They're now encouraging others to do the same through the free Healthy Happy Hearts programme delivered through Fish is the Dish by Seafish (the not-for-profit UK authority on seafood).

Piloting the programme the Aitchison family found that simple changes to their diet could make a real difference to health and fitness levels. Blood tests conducted at the start and the end of the project demonstrated positive increases in Omega-3 blood count; and dad, Steve (36) particularly noticed improvements as he trained for the Edinburgh Marathon (cutting more than ten minutes off his time on the previous year). Speaking about the project in a short video for Fish is the Dish Steve said:

"We started this journey because we were keen to improve our own health and fitness levels and ensure that our children learned the importance of a healthy balanced lifestyle.

“We learned through a simple blood test conducted by the University of Stirling that we weren’t getting the right balance of this essential oil in our diet and wanted to do something about it. So we signed up for Healthy Happy Hearts.”

“Throughout the six week programme we all eat seafood twice a week every week and loved it. In total we must have tried over 10 fish species.”

“I particularly noticed the benefits on my training for the Edinburgh Marathon. I ran the marathon the previous year and found training hard on my body, but by building seafood into my diet I didn’t have any issues this year. I also got back into my skinny jeans!”

Explaining why Steve may have experienced these benefits Dr Jane McKenzie, dietician and senior lecturer, from Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh said:

“You may only notice the benefits of long chain Omega-3 when you need them most, for example it helps the body repair torn muscle or tissue much quicker, which is why Steve may have experienced less pain in training for the Marathon this year. For things like chronic heart complications this could also be a matter of life or death, as the body needs to repair itself efficiently to avoid damage to the heart muscle or even a heart attack. Eating the wrong kind of fatty acids can restrict the body’s ability to repair itself.”

Seafish launched Healthy Happy Hearts through Fish is the Dish to help improve the health of the nation and reduce the risk of chronic disease. The not-for-profit body is providing over 100 people the opportunity to take part in the free personalised programme via [www.fishisthedish.co.uk](http://www.fishisthedish.co.uk)

Encouraging others to sign up to the programme, Steve Aitchison added: “It’s the long term health benefits that are most important. Our family will definitely be eating much more fish from now on and would recommend the Healthy Happy Hearts

programme to other families.”

Steve was so inspired by the programme, he even wrote his own song about the experience and recorded a short music video with the whole family which you can watch here:-

The free Healthy Happy Hearts programme will provide 125 people from throughout the UK with a pack containing a quick DIY blood test (a little clicker type device), information, recipes, and samples. The initial test, analysed by the University of Stirling, will measure the balance of essential Omega fatty acids in participants’ blood. Using the results of the test, individuals can then follow the six-week nutritional plan created by dieticians at the Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. The plan is designed to show easy ways to get participants to eat the government’s recommended two portions of fish per week.

Speaking about the programme Dr McKenzie said: “Many people will be surprised at just how easy it is to make the simple diet and lifestyle changes that could improve the balance of Omega-3 and make a significant difference to their health and wellbeing.

“Whether you’re a stay-at-home mum, a busy working parent, a high profile leader or an elite sports person, having the right Omega-3 to Omega-6 balance is essential for your body. When participants get their results we hope this will be a good reality check for people to eat healthy or to reinforce their informed food choices that support a healthy active lifestyle.”

Launching the call for more participants, Heather Middleton a spokesperson for Fish is the Dish by Seafish said: “We’re delighted that the Aitchison family experienced real benefits from their involvement in Healthy Happy Hearts. We hope that they will continue to benefit from their involvement in the project for a long time to come and that our challenge can

help many others in the same way. Healthy Happy Hearts is here to show individuals that getting more seafood into our daily meals needn't be difficult.

“We would like to encourage people from across the country to take part in the programme and share their findings via our Fish is the Dish website, so that others can benefit from them.”

To sign up for the programme please visit [www.fishisthedish.co.uk](http://www.fishisthedish.co.uk)

Spaces on the programme will be allocated on a first come first served basis.