

Staying healthy with Edinburgh Leisure

Martin Hunt was referred by his GP to the Edinburgh Leisure Get Moving programme, and was keen to show us what a difference it has made to his health, hoping perhaps to encourage others.

The programme is run in collaboration with NHS Lothian to help people adopt a healthier lifestyle. Participants can either refer themselves to the initial 10 week group programme or seek a referral from their GP. The programme is a series of dietary and behaviour change sessions supporting people to make small changes which may help them lose about 5 to 10 per cent of their body weight. The groups are small and last for just an hour at each of the ten sessions.

Paulina Zawiska, Active Communities Supervisor with Edinburgh Leisure met Martin about a year ago when he was a participant at one of Edinburgh Leisure's courses. She said: "Martin joined the gym and got engaged with us. Now, he is on our Get Moving Weight Management programme which is a full year programme that helps people change their eating habits, become a bit more active and just become healthier.

"It is run along with NHS and once a person has been referred by their GP we invite them to come along and start with a ten week intervention. We see them on a weekly basis giving them advice and encouragement, with some tips on how to change their lifestyle. After that we have catch ups at three, six

and nine months to see that they are still on track, to help with any issues.

“As we do with everyone, we start by giving a little bit more advice about how to make healthier choices, how to manage portion sizes, how to start physical activity – where to start and what to do. Martin did not really need too much help. We all know what we need to do, and what we should be doing. It is just that sometimes we need a little push to walk a little bit more, to choose brown pasta over white pasta, so it is the little things here and there.”



Paulina Zawiska, Active Communities Supervisor with Edinburgh Leisure PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

As far as exercise goes, Paulina says the best exercise is the one that you enjoy. She explained: “For Martin it happened to be the gym – but he swims as well. We always encourage people to do what they like to do the most because that way they will stick with it.”

Paulina was very complimentary of Martin’s own progress on the course. She said he had stayed engaged throughout the programme, asking about what else he could do to continue to make steady gradual change. She said he did not expect miracles but he had his long term goals in sight, to reduce any reliance on medication for example.

Paulina said: “Even the pandemic did not phase him. He is still here and still going strong. I think he is doing fantastically well.”

Martin had been referred by his GP, but there is also an option to refer yourself to take part in the programme with classes running at gyms all over the city during the day, in the evenings and at weekends.



Martin Hunt has been on the Get Moving programme for over a

year now PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

Paulina showed us the standard programme the instructors use which includes a wide range of exercises. She said: “The programme is designed to work the whole body, strengthening the entire body as well as burning calories as you go along. There is no magic solution, but it is a very good starting point, even for those who may have some mobility issues as we can adapt the exercises to suit.

“In Martin’s case he was able to do all the exercises and make progress with them. And we show people what to do and explain why we are doing it, taking a few weeks before we let people do the exercises themselves, observing them first to make sure they have the right technique, and they are exercising at an appropriate level.”

At the session when we were filming Martin he had completed a 15 minute session on the treadmill, and was ready for the rowing machine and the cross trainer as well as some bar work.



Martin Hunt has been on the Get Moving Counterweight programme for just over a year now PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

He admitted that he did not come into the gym before, preferring instead to be a regular swimmer. But he said: “I was beginning to put a little extra weight on and my GP did a diabetic review and said that my HbA1c count was 58 which is on the high side. She told me to start taking responsibility for myself, perhaps losing a bit of weight.

“My GP referred me to the Counterweight programme about two years ago, and I went to the programme at Ainslie Park and thoroughly enjoyed it. There was no judgement, it was all about education – learning about diet, food and sugars. I found it fascinating.

“There was a group of ten of us and we all became quite good

chums. After a year of doing that until March 2020, I then had my review and my GP was thrilled that my HbA1c had gone down to 44. It was exercise, diet and lifestyle.

“Then of course we had lockdown and when I went for my review in June this year I was determined that my count would go down to 42 which would mean I was no longer in the Type 2 spectrum for diabetes. Sadly, I had gone up to 48 and I was so disappointed.

“But I am absolutely determined to do it now that the gyms are open and the programme is running again.”

Martin walked 10,000 steps every day during lockdown, but is convinced that the diet advice which the programme offers, as well as the encouragement and support is key. He said: “I think you need a variety, and also working with others to ensure your diet is good. The whole point of Counterweight is that it is a dynamic making you want to try and help yourself and help others as well. That was incredibly important. I think Paulina and her colleagues do such brilliant work.”

As well as the individual Get Moving scheme run at several Edinburgh Leisure venues, there is a family healthy lifestyle programme which children from five can join in and achieve a healthier weight.

HbA1c is a person’s average blood glucose (sugar) levels for the last two to three months. If you have diabetes, Diabetes UK recommend an ideal HbA1c level is 48mmol/mol (6.5%) or below.

For information on the Get Moving with Counterweight Group Programme you can call NHS on 0131 537 9169 or contact the Active Communities team by emailing active@edinburghleisure.co.uk or calling 0131 458 2260.



Martin Hunt has been on the Get Moving programme for over a year now and loves going to the gym PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter