A joint project of change? How men and their female partners talk about negotiating lifestyle changes during men’s participation in a weight loss and healthy living programme.

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Background – Obesity in UK men

Prevalence of obesity in UK men is amongst highest in Europe

Priority for public health – developing weight management strategies appealing and acceptable to men who wish to lose weight

Eating and physical activity (PA) are social behaviours – attempts to make changes influenced by the social environment.

Previous research with FFIT participants revealed importance of female family members in supporting (or undermining) dietary improvements

How do women view men’s dietary changes and how do they influence men’s attempts to increase PA?
Aim and methods

**Aim:** To further our understanding of the impact of female partners on men’s attempts to improve their diet and increase PA

**Methods:**

- Semi-structured interviews conducted separately with participants (n=7) in an adapted version of FFIT delivered at a professional rugby club (RuFIT) and their female partners (n=7)

- Interviews investigated a range of topics, including experiences of negotiating change to food, eating and PA practices within family context

- Thematic analysis, comparing by gender
Key findings

Changes to diet:

➢ Most female partners were ‘facilitative allies’ who were supportive of, and joined in, men’s efforts to eat more healthily

➢ For most couples, changes to diet could be seen as a joint project of change

Changes to PA:

➢ Female partners were more often ‘detached allies’ in relation to men’s efforts to increase PA; some joined in to a certain extent, others left men to it, for a few the time men spent exercising was a source of tension

➢ For most couples, increasing PA was less of a joint project of change as compared to making changes to diet
Conclusions

Changes to diet:

- Women provided direct support for men’s efforts to eat more healthily

Changes to PA:

- Women were not as directly involved in men’s efforts to become more active (sometimes despite men encouraging their partners to join them)

Implications:

- Importance of recognising social nature of behaviours we are trying to help people change

- Investigate the influence that can be exerted by the people around the individuals taking part in interventions