

John— Men's Shed in Halesworth

In order to develop the Fit Villages programme, we have been working with men across the county to gain insight around how we can engage with and design activities to suit older males. We held a focus group at Halesworth Mens Shed and have since worked with a gentleman called John who changed his life by getting active again:



"I have been reasonably healthy for most of my life. I gave up smoking at 35, and started going to the gym the following year. I had a very demanding career and family life, and was aware that this might be a good time to start taking my health more seriously.

My father had died suddenly at age 61 from a heart attack, and this told me that there was a good chance that I had inherited this risk.

I went to the gym, usually twice a week, for the next 12 years. Because of work pressures (which was no excuse) I stopped going. I was in my late forties by then. I then started putting on weight, which can happen as you get older.

My diet was only okay – not really as it should have been. By the age of 55 I was 2 stone heavier than I had been at 40. At 58, I was diagnosed with coronary heart disease and had stents fitted, which probably saved my life.

This was a wakeup call for me to get fit again and to make matters worse, my first wife died of cancer.

I started doing long walks every day to build my fitness, and started attending the gym again too and after a couple of years I met my new partner.

I had additional stenting work done 5 years after the first lot and the cardiologist told me that my core strength had meant that the treatment had been more successful. In the meantime, I moved in with my new partner, and my diet improved. Last year at age 66, I had a mild heart attack and the cardiologist again stated that my good lifestyle minimized the damage and aided my recovery.

Over this period I have lost the 2 stone gained in my forties and fifties, now getting in a jeans size that I could at age 30. The point I am trying to make here is that all exercise, and a good as diet as possible, can give you enough strength to withstand the blows that can, and will come, in later life. I went to the gym, but that is not essential, as basic things, such as brisk walking, cycling or swimming can give most of the benefits a gym membership can. Just half an hour a day of reasonably brisk exercise can make a huge difference. The physical benefits are obvious from regular exercise and good diet. The psychological and emotional benefit is considerable too. So all of this can lengthen your life, but more importantly, give a better quality of life.

I think Fit Villages is a great initiative, intended as it is to get older people up and active and it is of course a great way to meet new people too."