FoodFit 2017 Programs Report

FoodFit by the numbers

From January to December 2017, FoodFit programs were delivered at 14 sites.

From January:
Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association, Calgary, AB
Interior Services, Kamloops, BC
The Local CFC, Stratford, ON
The Table CFC, Perth, ON
Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, Vancouver, BC
Interfaith Food Bank, Lethbridge, AB
Mission Services, Hamilton, ON
Partageons l’espoir/Share the Warmth, Montreal, PQ
The Alex CFC, Calgary, AB

New partners in April:
Ateliers Je Suis Capable, Sorel-Tracy, QC
Sherbourne Health Centre, Toronto, ON
Cowichan Green Community Foundation, Duncan, BC
"Ogwakwi:yo" Six Nations Health Services, Oshweken, ON

New partner in September:
Dartmouth North Community Food Centre, Dartmouth, NS

538 adults and 17 youth participated in 52 FoodFit programs and 2 FoodFit Youth programs. 74.45% (330/442) participants identified as female, 25.28% as male, and 0.27% identified as gender neutral. The average age of participants was 47 years old (ranging from 19 to 87 years).

406 adults completed at least 9 weeks of the program (representing a program incompletion rate of 24.53%) 162 participants from 2016 programs attended FoodFit Alumni programs offered at 8 partner sites.

Volunteers logged 2793.25 hours for our partners in the FoodFit program last year. Youth provided 251.5 hours of volunteer hours.

6060 healthy meals were shared in the program and 5341 healthy snacks were served to program participants. 2628 healthy meals were sent home with participants.
FoodFit Participant Outcomes

Eating healthier
With easy to understand nutrition resources and lots of hands-on learning in the kitchen, FoodFit participants gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to prepare healthier meals and snacks. % 89.63% (268/299) of participants reported improvements in their food preparation and safety skills, and 83.71% (283/302) learned something new about preparing/cooking healthier meals.

66.85% (123/184) of participants increased their daily fruit and vegetable consumption. Only 45.39% (123/271) of participants were eating 5 or more servings of fruit and veg at the beginning of program, this increased to 65.66% (130/198) by the end of the programs. 73.67% (235/319) of participants have increased the amount of whole grains in their diet. 75% (9/12) of participants in Ogwakwi:yo at Six Nations Health Services increased the number of days per week they are eating traditional food and 25% (3/12) were including more wild game in their diet.

The recipes shared and sent home in the program contained the right ingredients for success for FoodFit participants: 97.17% (309/318) found the recipes easy to follow, 97.81% (312/319) found the meals and snacks shared in the program appetizing and tasty, and 79.02% (241/305) of participants had already used FoodFit recipes at home during the program. 94.36% (301/319) tried a new food or an old food prepared in a different way in the program.

“I feel like I have more energy and my heart doesn’t feel weird anymore.” FoodFit Participant, Duncan BC

“FoodFit has given me the knowledge to make healthier decisions.” FoodFit Participant, Calgary AB (Hillhurst-Sunnyside)

“Understanding importance of healthy food choices and making them, happier me – who wants to walk, spend time outside my home with others and sleeps better.” FoodFit Participant, Toronto, ON

“One of my symptoms of clinical depression is isolation. Being part of this program has prevented me from that.” FoodFit participant Dartmouth, NS
Participants are making healthier choices they can live with!
Many participants commented on healthier substitutions they are making: replacing applesauce for sugar, spices and herbs to replace salt, yogurt or avocado instead of mayonnaise, homemade instead of store-bought salad dressings and soups, making “sweet treats” with vegetables (chocolate beet cake, avocado pudding), water instead of sugar sweetened beverages, beans instead of meat in burgers, squash for spaghetti, whole grain pasta, putting beans in smoothies for protein, using more lentils, beans and chickpeas to replace meat, frozen bananas to make ice cream, having fruit instead of less healthy sweets like candy and chocolates, nuts and seeds in salads instead of croutons, hummus and salsa as tasty vegetable dips, quinoa/brown rice/millet instead of white rice/potatoes.

Participants are eating more salad, vegetables, fruit, whole grains, pulses, nuts, tofu, salsa and hummus. 46.58% (136/292) of participants were able to completely cut out one or more unhealthy food choices from their diet by the end of the program. Many participants told us they cut back on (or completely cut out) added sugar, potato chips, candy/chocolate, pop, salt, red meat, saturated fats and oils, white bread, fried food and processed foods.

49.83% (146/293) of participants decreased the number of days they consumed sugar sweetened beverages during the FoodFit program. 26.95% (80/297) increased the number of days in a week they ate breakfast (many participants were already eating breakfast 7 days a week and had no room for improvement). 42.41% (123/290) of participants were making home-made meals from scratch more days in a week by the end of the program.
**Moving more**

FoodFit encourages participants to increase their daily physical activity – we don’t set targets because everyone is starting from a different starting line. We just ask them to try better! Participants share a group 30 minute walk every week in the program and are introduced to a number of at-home strength and flexibility exercises of varying levels of difficulty that help daily activities like sitting down/getting back up, pushing open doors, bending over to tie shoes, and picking things up from the floor easier. 61.34% (119/194) of participants increased their daily average steps over the course of the program – on average, the program boosted steps by 2613 daily – that’s almost 2 more km daily!

"**FoodFit was very informative and fun and interesting. I would pass on my knowledge to friends and relatives to attend such programs in the long haul. Very nutritional recipes were the best. Keep up this great program!**"  
Ogwakwi:yo participant Six Nations ON

"**I saw how comprehensive the program is and I was growing bored with my usual diet of soups, stews and chili, so I signed up to learn new tricks. As a senior, I want less pots and pans and more healthy living. FoodFit fits the bill!**" FoodFit participant Kitsilano BC

"**I’m preparing healthy food for my family, teaching my daughter how to read labels, compare items, count salt and sugar, and we’re taking walks after meals.**" FoodFit participant The Alex, Calgary AB
Making new friends
Group support and social connection are key ingredients to participant success in FoodFit. 86.67% (273/315) of participants reported meeting a new friend, with 84.19% (261/310) making a social connection with someone they felt they could count on for support. Reducing social isolation can positively impact long term health – 118 FoodFit participants are from solitary households.

“I’m having more positive relationship with food. Trusting myself in my capabilities in choosing food and creating meals. Cooking with people and eating with people were my favorite part of the program. There are lots of laughter shared over sharing food which made the whole experience much nourishing. I really loved this program.” FoodFit participant, Toronto ON

“I’m happier, more in control, excited about healthy food.” FoodFit participant Hillhurst Sunnyside Community, Calgary AB

“L’utilisation de légumineuses, le rapport avec les épices est meilleur.” FoodFit participant, Sorel-Tracy PQ

“The FoodFit program has given me a healthier lifestyle, my mood is relaxed, physically I feel fine. It helps my body, mind, and spirit. I feel good about myself and happier.” FoodFit participant, Hamilton ON

“My sugar levels were very high – mid 8s. I’m proud of my mid 6s! Better, healthier food choices will follow me for a long time coming.” Ogwakwi:yo participant, Oshweken ON
Feeling better
The FoodFit program introduces many ways for participants to measure their health or gauge their fitness level – helping them define ‘healthier’ in their own terms. 74.45% (236/317) of FoodFit participants reported an improvement in their physical health, and 78.79% (246/313) noted improved mental health.

Participants had the opportunity to rank symptoms related to diet and physical activity. The top 5 symptoms that were improved upon or resolved by the end of the program include: running out of energy, running out of breath climbing stairs, experience insomnia or restless sleep, having difficulty picking things up or bending to tie shoes, and experiencing constipation.

Changing families – the reach beyond the program
The FoodFit program reaches beyond the direct participants: we estimate an additional 540 adults and 258 youth could be indirectly impacted in households shared with our participants.

Almost all FoodFit participants (97.86%, 320/327) would recommend the program to a family member or friend.
**Feeling the FoodFit difference**

Of the 293 participants who reported living with preexisting chronic disease or health conditions at the beginning of the program (e.g. type 2 diabetes, prediabetics, hypertension, high cholesterol, arthritis, chronic pain, depression, overweight/obesity, anxiety, poor sleep patterns), 61.43% (180/293) felt the FoodFit program helped them to better manage their condition.

Of those participants recording biometric health measures:

- 37.30% (91/244) of participants increased their level of fitness during the FoodFit program (based on age and heart rate measurements).
- 22.47% (40/178) of participant lowered their BP status (anywhere from stage 2, stage 1, pre hypertensive, to normal).
- 54% (61/113) of participants lost 113.15 inches (287.4 cm) from their waistlines –an average of 1.85 inches (4.7 cm, equivalent to just over one pant size).

“I lost 60 pounds! Just kidding. But the increased veg intake has me feeling better.” FoodFit participant, Duncan BC

“I love cooking and laughing with others.” Ogwakwi:yo participant, Oshweken ON

“FoodFit has brought awareness into my life. I feel confident I will be able to gradually be more consistent in making healthier choices.” FoodFit participant, Hamilton ON

“Overall improved my outlook on life. Feel valued and happy. Positive attitude in my daily routine.” FoodFit participant, Kitsilano BC

“To be oriented with Canadian food. To incorporate healthy choices to my daily living. To be a healthy individual. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” FoodFit participant, Lethbridge AB

“I walk more. Rely on others for transport less. I enjoy eating different veggies and fruit. I’m not alone.” FoodFit Participant, Calgary AB (The Alex)
What’s in the Box Food Challenge!
In the final week of the FoodFit program, participants are broken into small groups for the “What’s in the Box Challenge”. Each group is given a collection of core ingredients and a list of kitchen staples they can use to improvise and create a new healthy dish to share with their FoodFit team and special guests. Some participating sites invite “celebrity” judges or family to attend the graduation meal and share in these (mostly) edible creations.

This exercise demonstrates the ability of community members to work together, some taking on leadership roles for the first time, tests their confidence and skills to create a healthy, delicious dish without the aid of a recipe or input by the facilitator – the participants are truly helping each other in this fun and popular challenge. Facilitators report very few “flops” or “disasters” and gush with pride about the creativity and determination of their FoodFit teams to “get it right and make it good.”

FoodFit Mission Services (Hamilton)

FoodFit The Alex Community Food Centre (Calgary)
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FoodFit Follow Up – First Annual Program Survey

Starting in 2017, facilitators followed up with participants who completed the FoodFit program to offer annual questionnaires. We looked to find out if FoodFit graduates are able to continue using the knowledge, skills, motivation and social supports after the program finished. We heard from a total of 91 previous FoodFit participants, some as far back as the pilot programs in Perth and Stratford ON in 2014! Out of the 65 respondents who let us know when they first completed the FoodFit program, 36 finished over a year ago, 10 between 6 months and 1 year, 9 from 3 to less than 6 months, and 11 less than 3 months. 45/65 (69.23%) have participated in FoodFit Alumni programs, 16 have continued on as participant volunteers, and 4 have volunteered their time as FoodFit Advocates gathering feedback from community members on the meals offered in drop-in programs and sharing their learning and FoodFit knowledge on how to serve healthier, tasty, and satisfying plates! We will be changing up the Annual Program Survey strategy for 2018 to follow up with 100 FoodFit graduates from 2017 with an updated telephone survey that will be more representative of the overall 2017 participants from all partner sites.

84.12% (53/63) annual program survey respondents reported they were able to maintain social connections they made in the program over the past year.

69.57% (16/23) participants have maintained or increased to 5 or more servings of fruit and vegetables since completing the FoodFit program. These fruit and vegetable numbers are based on estimates rather than daily fruit and vegetable tracking forms.

88.71% (55/62) respondents reported they were able to keep up with healthy food choices they adopted during the FoodFit program and 81.43% (57/70) were maintaining their level of physical activity. Those who reported they faced barriers to continuing healthy habits reported cost of food, lack of motivation/laziness, not enough time to prepare or plan meals.

90% (45/50) respondents reported maintaining or increasing the number of home-cooked meals since the program ended.

94.74% (54/57) respondents reported keeping down or lowering their sugar sweetened beverage intake.

86.96% (40/46) respondents reported changing the way the shop for or chose food based on what they learned in the FoodFit program.

82% (41/50) former FoodFit participants have referred to their manual since completing the program.

78.43% (40/51) of our program graduates have shared their knowledge, recipes, meals or resources from the FoodFit program to help others in their life make healthier changes to their lifestyle too!

47.69% (31/65) former FoodFit participants are still using their pedometers they received in the program. Those that are not reported they are either using their own step/activity tracking device or that their pedometer was lost or broken. We did not ask participants to track their steps for the follow up survey.

“I started walking to work every day and I noticed I am more able to climb stairs and run for the bus, so I encourage others to start walking.” FoodFit APS participant

“I save healthy recipes and pass them to others. I discuss with others what I’ve learned in this course.” FoodFit APS participant

“I eat way less sugar. I have introduced a lot more healthy foods into my regular diet that I wouldn’t have been about or tried before the FoodFit program.” FoodFit APS participant

“Eating healthy is not only much better for you, it is not that hard and can be a lot of tasty
fun while having great long lasting results.” FoodFit APS participant

“I am eating twice as many vegetables than before, and am very aware of the sugar content in things now. I also read labels more.” FoodFit APS participant

“I learned some information about substituting ingredients and not compromising the flavor and taste of a meal, dish or dessert. It’s all about making smarter choices.” FoodFit APS participant

“Staying healthy and making healthy choices in food and lifestyle and passing down that knowledge to my children.” FoodFit APS participant

“I eat more fruits and vegetables. Drinking sweet beverages is a big weakness for me but I try my best to drink more water.” FoodFit APS participant

“Exercising doesn’t need to be done at the gym only. Drink plenty of water and replace soda and caffeine with herbal tea and hot water.” FoodFit APS participant

“Love passing on the knowledge of how to help others recover health of body and mind.” FoodFit APS participant.

“Being mindful of a healthy plate, eating more fruit and vegetables, knowing there is support.” FoodFit APS participant.


“Eating good healthy food. Socializing with other people, so I am not at home alone. I never learned to cook growing up. I am trying to walk more and watching the counter.” FoodFit APS participant.
“I learnt how to eat healthy, how to make salads, soups and to eat whole grains, I am also teaching my kids how to get used to salads and healthy living. I have to learn more recipes and then helping my friends and neighbours as well learn the way of healthy living.” FoodFit Participant, Calgary AB (The Alex)

“Realizing it is not a lot of work to make changes, ‘cause it is all about you.” FoodFit Participant, Kamloops BC

“I know I can make simple changes to help improve my well being and health. I feel better about myself and feel better eating healthier food. Making salads every day. More protein after exercise. Adding more herbs in the dishes. Getting more steps in each day.” FoodFit Participant, Stratford ON

“I lost 3kg and 5cm. Motivitation. I am like a butterfly, I feel better. I know that I am doing something for myself, I’m happy.” FoodFit Participant, Perth ON

“I walk faster, longer. I move easily, feel lighter. I sleep better. Feel more focused.” FoodFit Participant, Montreal PQ

“Meillere tolérance à la marche, un peu plus de souffle.” Participant Bonne Bouffe et Bonne Forme, Sorel-Tracy PQ