

## Healthy Eating and Living in Prison



With obesity at an all time high, there has never been a greater urgency to address the detrimental effect poor food choices and lack of exercise have within our prison system.

In one of his reports, ex-chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick, commented: "Some men emerge only to take an occasional shower, to make a quick phone call or to queue to collect a tray of carb-rich food at mealtimes".

*At 6' 1" in height, I went into prison a reasonably trim 12.5 stone with a healthy BMI. I came out a few years later at around 16 stone. On average I think I gained over 16lbs per year".*  
Ex-prisoner

Recognising this problem, RECOOP developed and has successfully delivered, a 6-week healthy weight and exercise programme appropriate for people of any age and ability whilst in a custodial setting.

Group-based sessions can be delivered weekly by prison or gym staff using the Weight Management & Exercise programme.

**HELP** introduces prisoners to safe and structured exercise, whilst encouraging and supporting them to achieve their goals. Whether it be increased fitness levels, weight loss or physical rehabilitation, participants are encouraged to engage at a pace they feel comfortable with.

*"We have had 100% success rate with all participants losing 5% of their total body weight. We have run three courses so far and are now on our fourth".*  
HMP Send

The objective is to help people change their relationship with exercise and food for good, not just while they are in prison. The 6-week programme offers new ways of thinking about food and exercise, with supporting information which can be taken into the community on release.

The focus is on group support, sharing ideas and experiences and participants can contribute as much, or as little, as they feel comfortable with.

The **HELP** programme includes:

- A 2-hour staff training session on how to deliver the **HELP** Programme.
- A comprehensive "Facilitator Folder" containing weekly Session Plans and all supporting resources for the 6 weeks.
- Scales that measure not only weight, but BMI and Muscle Mass.
- Pedometers for a group of 10 people.
- A selection of plastic foods you will need for use during sessions.

The data collected by RECOOP during our last project for HMPPS, where we assessed the need and ability of prisons to adapt their regimes to meet the needs of older prisoners, suggested:

- 34% of prisoners felt they were overweight
- 13% felt that they were underweight
- Fewer than half felt they were getting enough exercise.

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