COUCH TO FITNESS

from OUR PARKS

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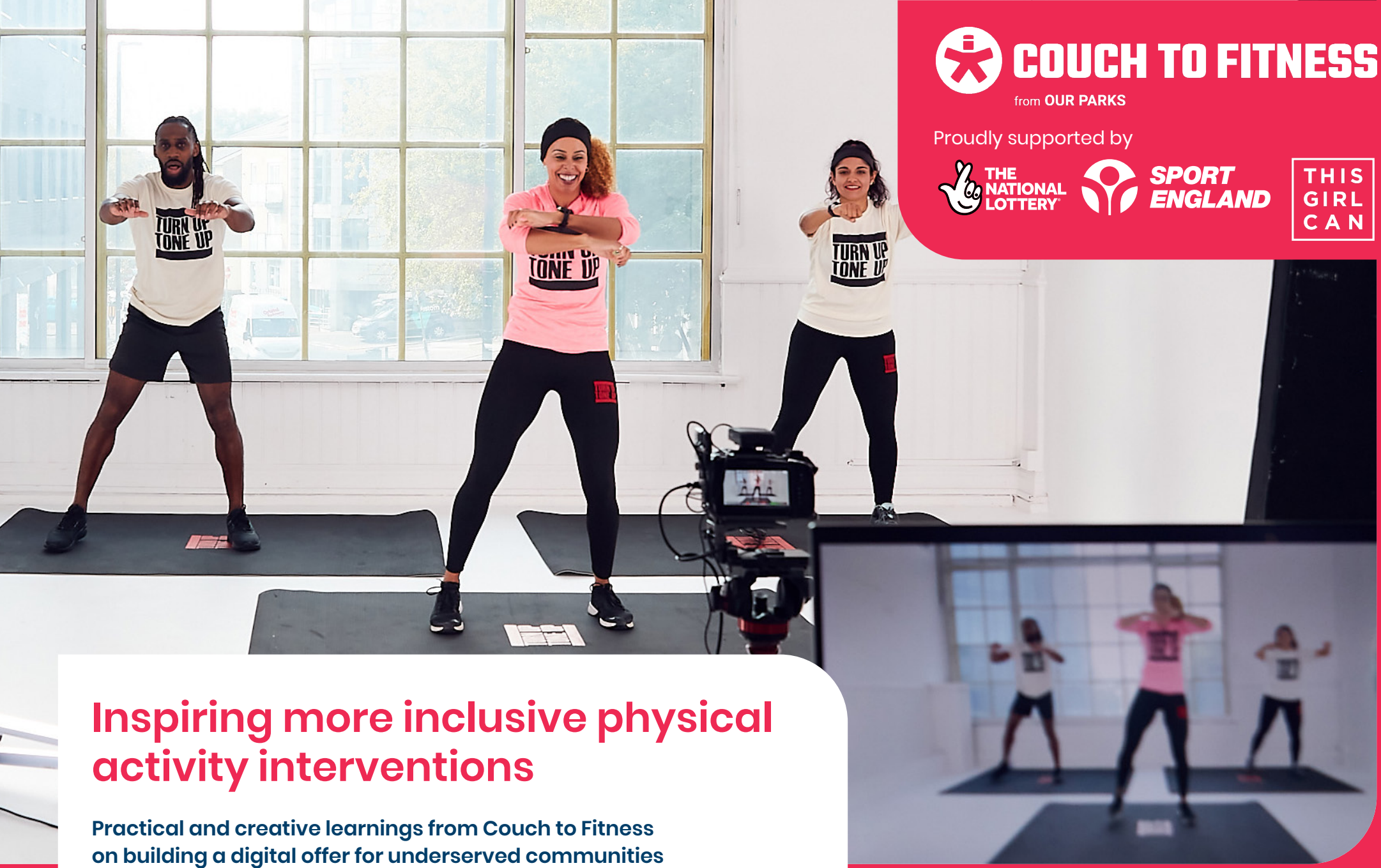
THIS GIRL CAN



Inspiring more inclusive physical activity interventions

Practical and creative learnings from Couch to Fitness on building a digital offer for underserved communities

August 2024

sportengland.org

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Introduction

Use the menu to explore each section:

- **The intention of this report**
- **The origin of Couch to Fitness**
- **What does Couch to Fitness mean in practice?**
- **Couch to Fitness in numbers**



The intention of this report

Over the last few years Sport England data has highlighted deep-rooted inequalities in sport and physical activity. Some audiences continue to experience a lack of suitable options and opportunities to be active; in particular culturally diverse communities, those in lower socio-economic groups, and people who live with long term health conditions and disabilities.

Additionally, there continues to be a gender activity gap whereby fewer women than men are physically active. Consequently, for some time Sport England has been building expertise in how to engage specific audiences where inequality exists, through campaigns such as This Girl Can.

Couch to Fitness is an example of a Sport England funded project designed specifically to reach and enable culturally diverse and lower socio-economic groups.

To date, few digital interventions have been designed specifically for these groups and indeed, many exercise provisions have unknowingly excluded them. We believe our journey from concept through to delivery and ongoing development holds valuable, practical learning that may inspire others to address underserved audiences such as these.

This report is for anyone interested in creating inclusive physical activity interventions that work for specific audiences.

Whether you work in the sport and physical activity sector, charity or voluntary sector, healthcare or marketing, there are learnings in a range of areas such as digital product development, community building and targeted marketing. We hope our story will inspire many more initiatives to help address the inequalities that persist in this space.



The origin of Couch to Fitness

In 2020 Covid-19 lockdown restrictions were hampering physical activity levels among the public, in particular lower socio-economic groups and culturally diverse communities, specifically Black and Asian (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Proportion inactive by socio-economic group (NS SEC*) pre and post start of lockdown

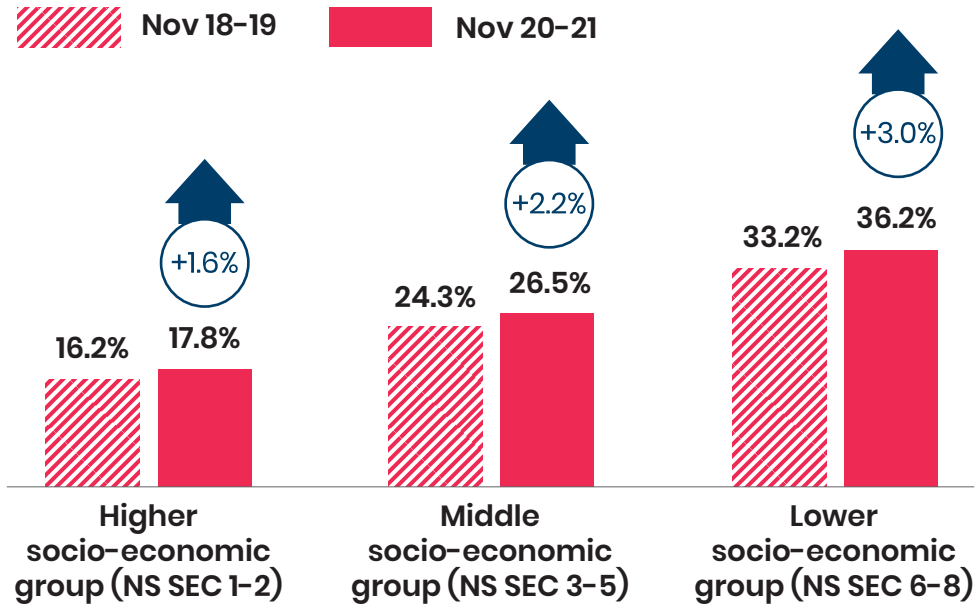
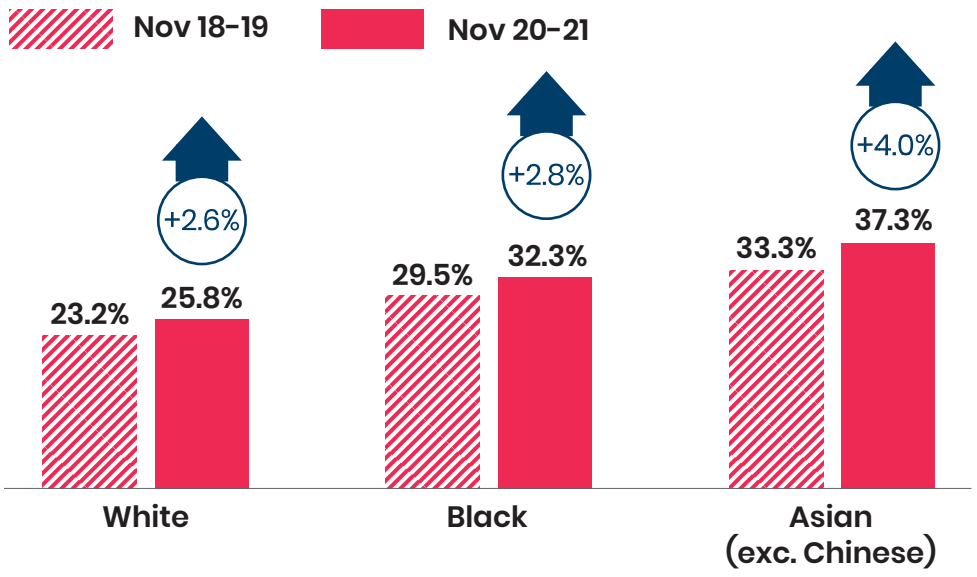


Figure 2: Proportion inactive by ethnicity* pre and post start of lockdown



* Link to references

The origin of Couch to Fitness cont...

To reach and support lower socio-economic groups and culturally diverse communities, specifically Black and Asian, Sport England initially worked with London Sport to promote Couch to 5K, a 9-week running programme for beginners. However, feedback suggested that some people did not feel comfortable leaving their home at that time, and that not all were motivated by running.

In response to this, Our Parks was engaged to develop Couch to Fitness, a 9-week programme that helps people build confidence in their ability to be active from the safety and comfort of their own home. With their expertise of running free, inclusive park workouts across London and online, Our Parks were well placed to deliver such a programme.



Couch to Fitness report

Compared to higher socio-economic groups:

- People in lower socio-economic groups had higher levels of inactivity prior to Covid-19
- People in lower socio-economic groups also had a greater increase in inactivity following the introduction of Covid-19 lockdown measures

Compared to White audiences:

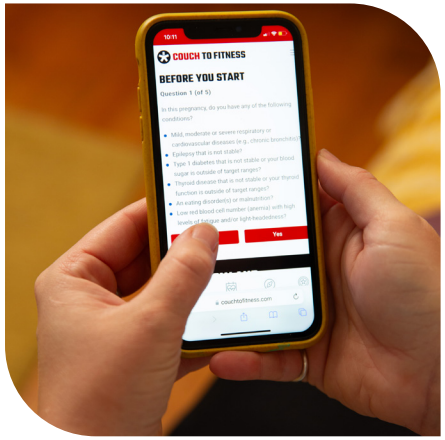
- Black and Asian communities had higher levels of inactivity prior to Covid-19
- Black and Asian people also had a greater increase in inactivity following the introduction of Covid-19 lockdown measures

What does Couch to Fitness mean in practice?



A free, 9-week digital programme that helps people build con idence in their ability to be active from home.

Developed by Our Parks with support from London Sport and funded by Sport England, the programme involves expert instructors guiding you through three 30-minute sessions a week, with rest days in between and progressively building in intensity each week.





- No membership fee or subscription ✓
- On-demand ✓
- No equipment needed ✓
- Designed for beginners ✓
- Options to follow multiple fitness levels on screen ✓
- Led by expert instructors ✓

Couch to Fitness in numbers



* Link to references

Part 1:
Building a digital intervention for underserved audiences

Use the menu to explore each section:

- Initial concept development: getting off on the right foot
- Putting users at the heart of all activity
- Couch to Fitness timeline
- Couch to Fitness version 1: the first offer
- Couch to Fitness version 2: couchtofitness.com is born
- Key product decisions along the way
- Creating belonging, support and engagement among users
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- Ongoing iteration: overview of key developments
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Initial concept development: getting off on the right foot

The first version of Couch to Fitness was developed and launched extremely quickly, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic unfolding in 2020. Its accelerated development was made possible because 3 key elements were in place:

1

Clarity of the unmet need

Audience research and feedback had established an unmet need for a structured, at-home programme for beginners, free of charge forever. This became the permanent focus of Couch to Fitness.

2

Decision to build a Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

The initial Couch to Fitness offer was a simple playlist of YouTube video workouts, embedded on the Our Parks website. Audience response to this version validated the concept and enabled the case to be made for further development.

3

Right people in the room

The small, collaborative working group was both expert and nimble: Our Parks already offered digital workouts, London Sport had experience marketing to underserved audiences, while Sport England brought its campaign insight and financial support to the table.

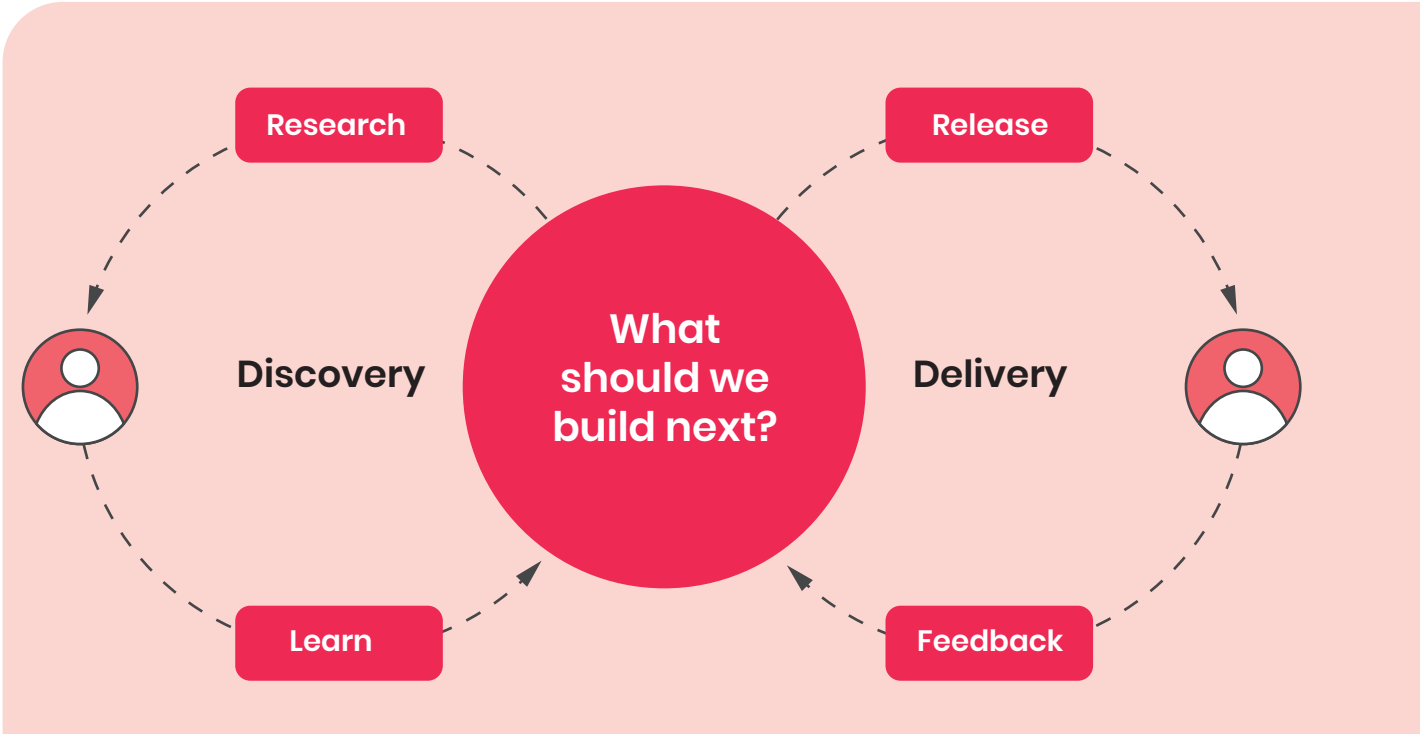
Our top learning
Making sure we had a sharp understanding of user needs and desires brought clarity and speed to the development and marketing of Couch to Fitness.

You could consider...
Documenting and sharing a clear and concise articulation of your target audience's unmet need.

Putting users at the heart of all activity

Over the following pages we highlight some of the ways in which we have engaged with users to ensure their needs and voices were being represented in the product and messaging.

User input has been critical for Couch to Fitness, both for discovery (unearthing needs and how to address them) and for ongoing product development and marketing (gaining feedback to improve reach and impact). In contrast to a linear project management approach, insight fuels the process continuously, as depicted in the image.





Couch to Fitness timeline

2020

Launch of Couch to Fitness 9 week programme.

Autumn: launch of bitesize and bhangra workouts.

User insight:
Interviews to inform the format, content, instruction style and branding.

2021

Launch of *couchtofitness.com* as a progressive web app.

User insight:
Surveys, prototype testing, analytics and heatmapping.

Post launch feedback via Facebook group.

2022

Launch of pre and postnatal programmes.

User insight:
Evaluation of programme impact via a survey, review of programme usage data and user interviews.

2023

Cost of living paid social media campaign.

User insight:
Survey and user interviews to explore engagement with the programme and Facebook group.

Review of data on COM-B factors highlighted in Sport England cost of living research.

2024

Exploration of integraton with healthcare pathways.

User insight:
Evaluation of healthcare referral opportunities via stakeholder mapping and user testing.

Couch to Fitness version 1: the first offer

The initial development of Couch to Fitness was driven by existing data and evidence which indicated a clear unmet need among the target audience.

However, further research was then conducted to inform the format, content, instruction style and branding of the product itself:

Research method

We recruited 13 people from the target audience and conducted qualitative interviews.

Key insights & recommendations

1. The name and overall concept resonated well
2. Need to cater to different abilities / intensity levels.
3. Naming of exercises must be clear and direct.
4. Music an essential component.

Combining this with Our Parks' expertise in engaging underserved audiences in physical activity meant the team was able to rapidly translate insight into action: the full content of the inaugural 9-week programme – 27 workouts – was filmed in a single weekend. Once the videos were uploaded to a YouTube playlist, the initial offer – or Minimum Viable Product (MVP) - was ready for launch.

User feedback post launch indicated a strong response to Couch to Fitness even in its non-optimised form – the target audience were interested in the product and derived value from it, albeit with suggestions for how it could be enhanced. This early validation was enough to secure funding for further development.

Our top learning

Building a MVP can be an efficient way to secure buy-in to further development, but this doesn't mean short-circuiting user input – in fact, it takes on heightened importance.

Couch to Fitness' discovery and delivery cycle has ensured a strong focus on audience needs at every stage of development – using audience insights to prioritise what to build.

You could consider...

Conducting research with the target audience to inform and develop your concept. It could be a short survey or informal interviews and doesn't have to be very expensive or time-consuming. You may find existing sources useful, such as Sport England's Active Lives and broader insight resources.*

* Link to references

Version 2: couchtofitness.com is born

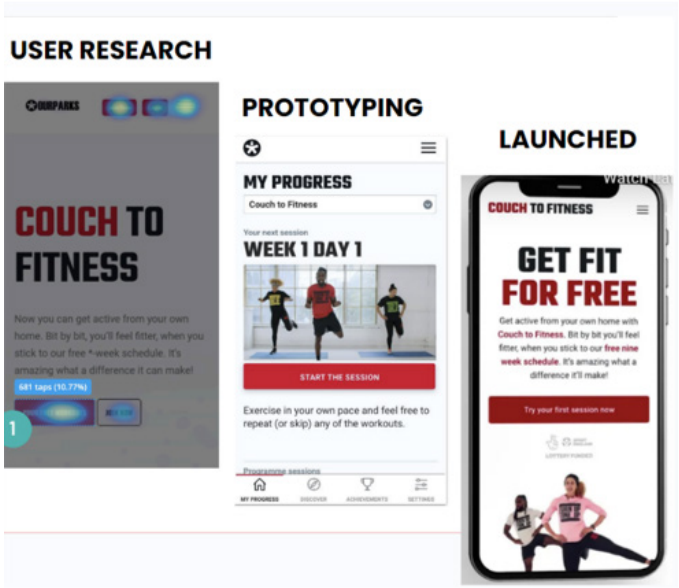
Based on the success of the initial product, the project team were able to proceed with a significant phase of product development: building a standalone website and community support offer, to take Couch to Fitness into the mainstream.

The discovery phase for this cycle included user research and prototyping to define key requirements for the ideal experience. In some cases, a test vs. control approach was used to determine how best to convey information,

Research method

User surveys, prototype testing, analytics and heatmapping to inform product optimisation.

Post-launch feedback was received via the Facebook group.



Key insights & recommendations

1. Simplify onboarding experience.
2. Create clear landing pages to convey what Couch to Fitness is and why users should register.
3. Make the first session available without registering.
4. Develop new content featuring exercise variations and reduce the number of floor-to-stand transitions within the workouts.
5. Support behaviour change by rewarding progress with badges and messages to prompt re-engagement where needed.

Our top learning

User research brought the target audience into the centre of the Couch to Fitness product development process, facilitating the prioritisation of decisions and surfacing many opportunities to enhance the experience.

You could consider...

Putting prototypes in front of end users at key stages of the development process and building in time to iterate based on feedback – it may save time and cost in the long run.

Key product decisions along the way

Along the way the Couch to Fitness team faced some larger product decisions where the pros and cons needed to be carefully weighed up. Two of these are outlined below.

Mobile app vs. Progressive Web App

A key decision was whether to develop Couch to Fitness as a Progressive Web App (PWA) or as a mobile app with discoverability on app stores. Creating an app may have been an intuitive choice for many, however the team decided to launch the programme as a PWA based on insight which revealed a slightly older target demographic with potential barriers to downloading apps and accessing data. The relatively lower ongoing development costs were also a consideration.

Capturing user data

Establishing a robust, data-driven understanding of user engagement and growth was important in order to measure progress reaching Couch to Fitness' key target audiences. However, there was a need to balance the desire for data against the potential friction created by presenting many questions to users at registration stage. To mitigate this, the team opted for a progressive approach whereby users initially only had to provide their email address. Later, once they had engaged more fully with the product, they were prompted for further demographic information.

Our top learning

These key decisions were made by carefully weighing up internal needs and user needs. In both cases, user research and insight provided helpful direction.

You could consider...

Consulting with users to minimise any unintended consequences of major project decisions.



Creating a sense of belonging, support and engagement among users

Community support, provided within the context of a private Facebook group, has become a core component of the Couch to Fitness offer, enhancing members' individual experiences.

Early insight highlighted that some users would appreciate an offer of peer support built around the Couch to Fitness programme. To address this, a private Facebook group was set up. Many users already spent time on Facebook, so this was a natural way for them to engage.

The Facebook group is a safe and supportive environment where members completing the same experience can share their progress and struggles with one another as well as interact directly with instructors for feedback and support. A member of the Our Parks team also takes time to proactively engage with users, helping to motivate them while also keeping posts on topic.



Research* has shown that the Facebook group creates a sense of belonging and engagement among users through:

Shared experience

Posts from members perceived as relatable provide motivation and a sense of belonging

Journey inspiration

Members sharing their progress and struggles helps to inspire

Instructor interaction

Instructors are active in the group, showing they care

Our top learning

A community space built around the clear shared purpose of Couch to Fitness users has added significant value to the proposition. It is viewed internally as an asset, supporting member satisfaction and retention as well as providing a valuable feedback channel.

You could consider...

Whether peer-to-peer interaction and support could add value to your users as part of the proposition.

* Link to references

Building a brand identity

The creation of brand and messaging guidelines was a key step in helping to ensure consistency, clarity and impact.

Driven by past research among the target audience along with marketing best practice, the guidelines emphasise the use of simple and positive language to promote physical activity and contain examples of words and formulations to use or to steer away from.

The brand voice is deployed within the platform, marketing and social media advertising, and is helpful for external agencies who may be less close to the brand. It also manifests in instructor delivery as a neutral and accessible tone which users find very supportive.

Our top learning

Developing a brand voice has enabled faster decision-making and created a more consistent experience for users, contributing to the success of the programme.

You could consider...

Taking the time to hone and document your own brand's tone of voice, and to share this with staff across all user touchpoints.

Extract from the Couch to Fitness 'brand bible':

We're accessible.

Using words and concepts that they can understand, without jargon or false promises.

Say: **"Lost motivation for exercise? We're here to help you find it again."**

Don't say: **"Get the body you've been searching for in just 9 weeks."**

We're friendly.

Sticking to simple, fun language that gets the message across.

Say: **"Not feeling it today? Our community is there for your on-days, and your off-days!"**

Don't say: **"Exercise is vital in living a healthy, fulfilled lifestyle."**

Ongoing iteration: overview of key developments

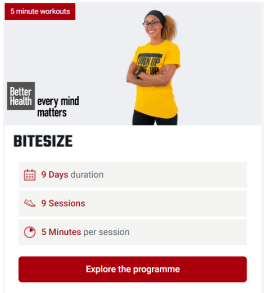
Couch to Fitness has evolved substantially since its inception, broadening the programmes on offer to appeal to new audiences and finding new ways to reach and engage them.

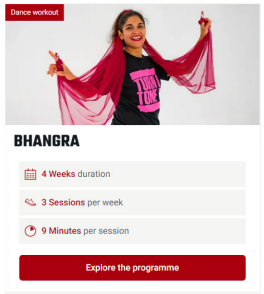
Key examples are below and further learnings in relation to marketing campaigns is shared in Part 2.

Autumn 2020

Bitesize and Bhangra programmes

New shorter duration & dance programmes

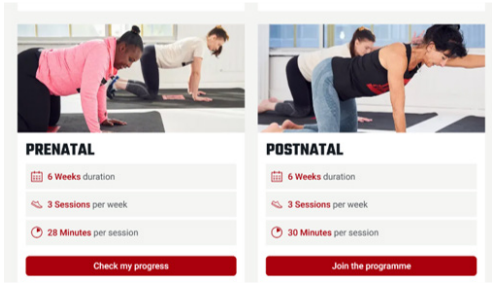




Summer 2022

Pre- and postnatal programmes

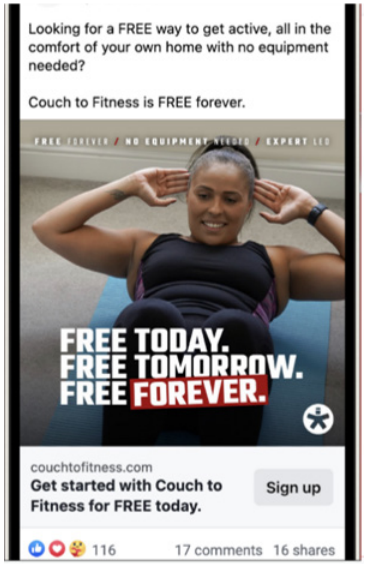
New 6-week workout programmes for pregnant and postnatal women



Summer 2023

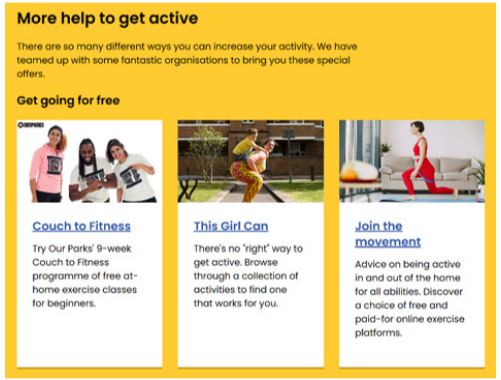
Cost-of-living campaign

Couch to Fitness launched a campaign to respond to the rising cost of living



Ongoing exploration:

Building Couch to Fitness into healthcare pathways



Investing time to evaluate

While there has been ongoing testing and learning in each phase of Couch to Fitness, it has also been important to take stock of overall effectiveness in relation to programme goals.

Following in-depth stakeholder discussion to identify focus areas for the evaluation, two separate pieces of evaluation work were conducted. An overview of these is shown below and key highlights on the next page.

Evaluation 1*: Determining impact of participation on physical activity and psychological wellbeing

A longitudinal survey with matched test and control samples, review of programme usage data, and user interviews.

Key insights and recommendations

1. Couch to Fitness had a positive impact on physical activity levels and wellbeing
2. Users reported increased capability, opportunity and motivation to be active***
3. 4 in 5 users intended to continue using the programme.

Evaluation 2: Assessing how to integrate Couch to Fitness with healthcare pathways

Stakeholder interviews and user testing.

Key insights and recommendations

1. Emphasise expert input behind Couch to Fitness to improve the confidence and willingness of healthcare professionals to signpost to it
2. Develop additional orientation and marketing materials for healthcare professionals
3. Develop audience/condition specific factsheets for use with Couch to Fitness.

Our top learning

Independent evaluation can add credibility to findings around a product, but it is important to take the time to define and agree goals before appointing an evaluator as there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

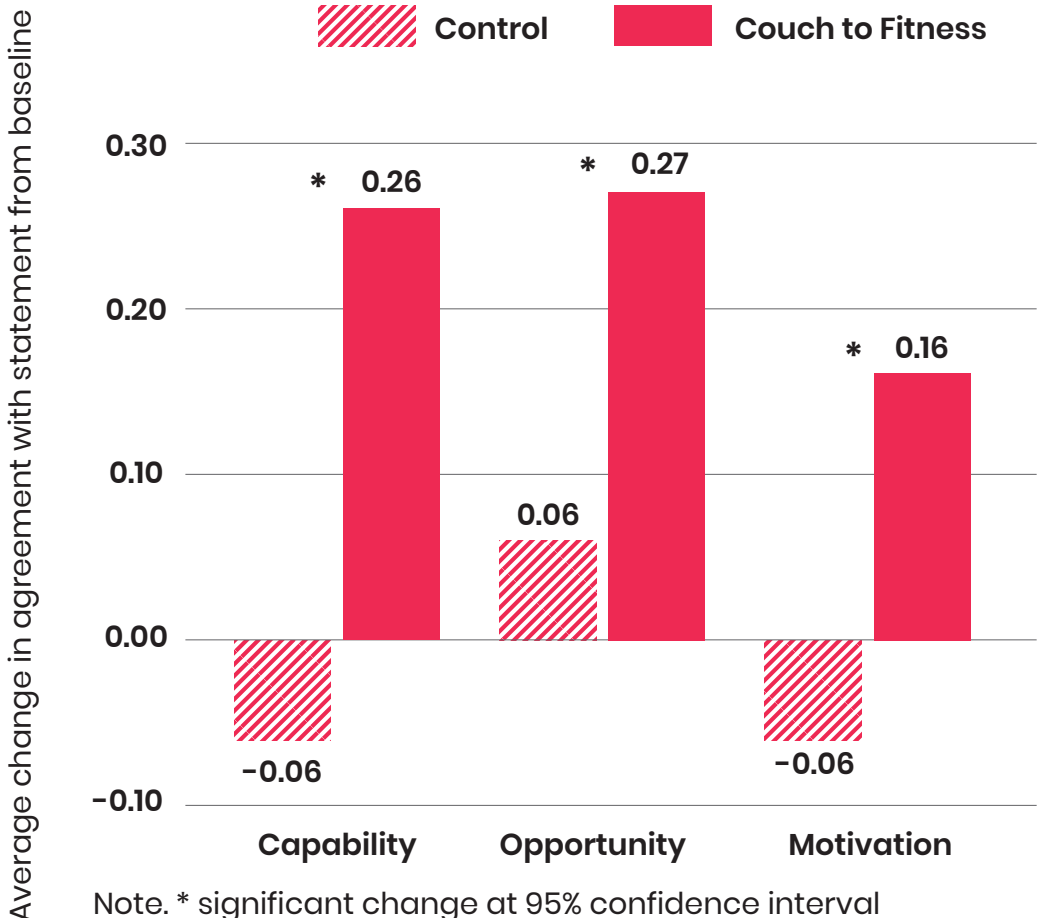
You could consider...

Prioritising evaluation objectives based on stakeholder discussion before you begin. Gov.uk offers helpful resources** on evaluating digital health products.

* Link to references

Evaluation 1 highlights

Couch to Fitness positively impacted users' capability, opportunity and motivation to be active:



Note. * significant change at 95% confidence interval

Matched pair analysis showed significantly more Couch to Fitness users agreeing in Survey 2 that:

- 'they were able to be physically active' (C)
- 'they had the opportunity to be active' (O)
- 'it was important for them to do exercise regularly' (M)

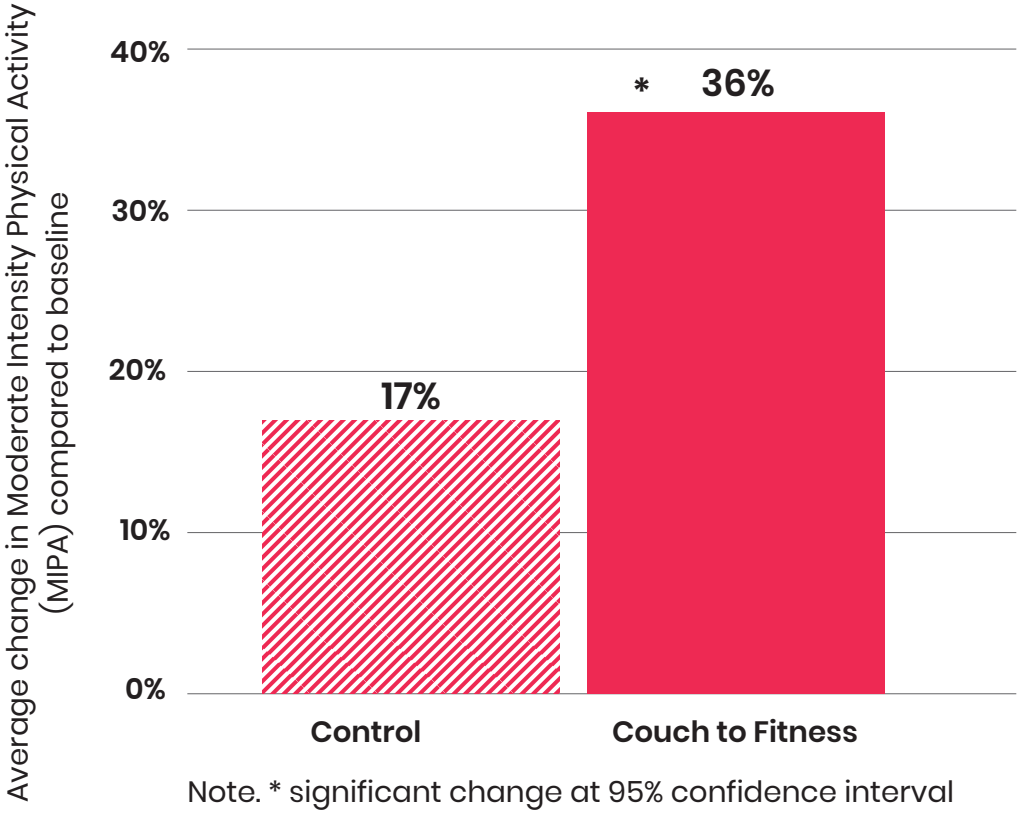
These changes were not evident for the non-users.

> *"If you're not very body confident and you don't feel like going out to a gym or to a class or if you don't feel very coordinated at doing things, it might give you the confidence to think I can sign up to a class outside and then interact with people...it might just be a springboard to something else for people if they're not unduly confident."*
>
> **Couch to Fitness user**

* Link to references

Evaluation 1 highlights cont...

Couch to Fitness users showed a significant increase in total physical activity which was more than double that shown by the control group:



Note. * significant change at 95% confidence interval

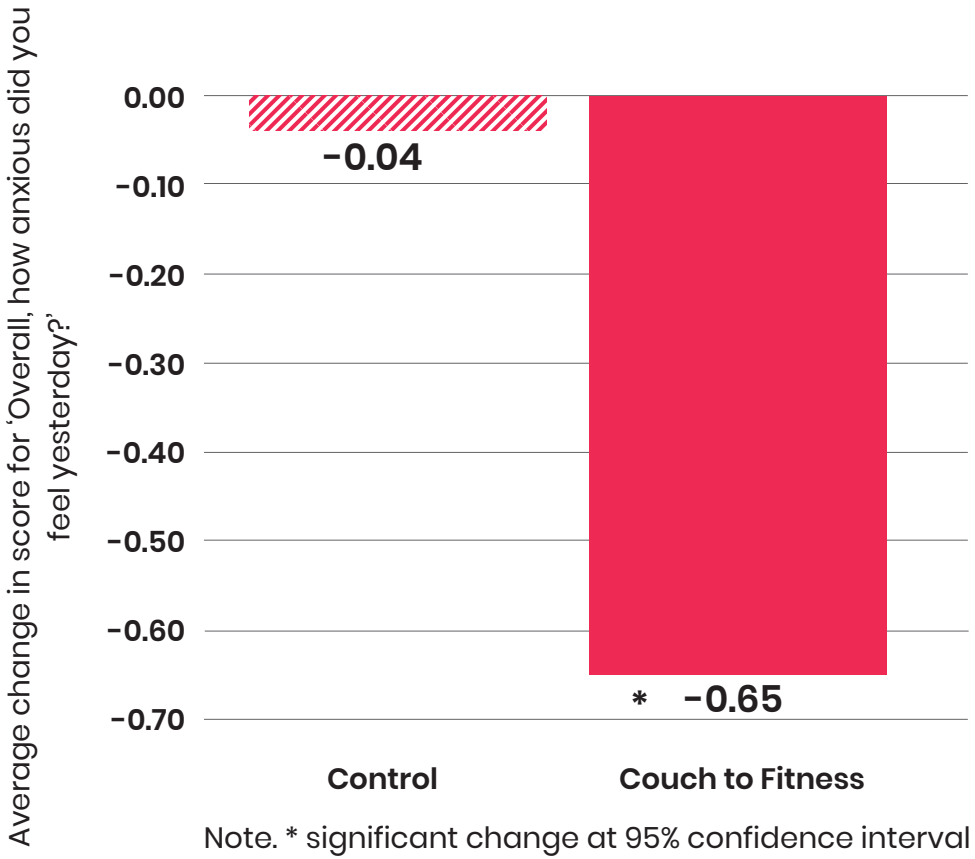
Whilst both users and non-users increased the amount of minutes spent doing physical activity from Survey 1 to Survey 2.

Couch to Fitness users increase was more than twice as big as non-users.

> ***"Couch to Fitness kickstarted me into believing I can exercise and stick to it. I've usually given up by now, but Couch to Fitness is totally addictive!"***

Evaluation 1 highlights cont...

Couch to Fitness users' showed a significant improvement in anxiety:



Note. * significant change at 95% confidence interval

Respondents were asked 'Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (0-10 scale).

At follow up Couch to Fitness users average scores had decreased from 4.63 to 4.08 (a significant change of -0.65) whilst the control group scores decreased from 3.63 to 3.59 (non-significant change of 0.04).

> ***"Probably mine is a little bit more on the mental health sort of side of things, to think that I'm doing something to physically help myself more. You know, in my mental health and hoping that that's gonna help me going forward in the future to keep more healthy really."***

Summary of top tips: Building a digital intervention for underserved audiences

Top tips of broadest relevance



It's worth documenting a **clear and concise articulation of the unmet need** that you are addressing for your target audience and keeping this front and centre throughout your work.



Whether or not you decide to create a Minimum Viable Product as Couch to Fitness did initially, it is important to **gain feedback from users early enough** to meaningfully inform proposition design.



Continue engaging with users on an ongoing basis to find opportunities to optimise the experience.



Consider conducting an **objective evaluation,** ensuring you prioritise objectives before you begin.

Potentially relevant to consider



Consider whether **peer-to-peer support** could add value to your offer – this could be provided outside of your platform in a forum such as Facebook.



Take the time **to hone and document your brand's tone of voice** to empower faster decision-making and create a consistent experience across user touchpoints.

Part 2:

Marketing a digital intervention to underserved audiences

Use the menu to explore each section:

Top tips from Couch to Fitness marketing campaigns

Summary of top tips

Appendix: Couch to Fitness campaigns

References



Top tips from Couch to Fitness marketing campaigns

The next few pages bring together some top tips from Couch to Fitness campaigns that may be useful to bear in mind in the development of other marketing campaigns. Click below if you wish to jump directly to any of the tips.

Each tip references Couch to Fitness campaigns as examples. You can find out more about the individual campaigns by clicking on the highlighted links within each tip or jumping to the appendix.

Top tip 1
Using multiple touchpoints to engage and convert

Top tip 2
Using customer insight as a foundation with the COM-B model

Top tip 3
Tailoring ads to different audiences

Top tip 4
Defining the audience, channel by channel

Top tip 5
Tailoring creative formats to channel norms

Top tip 6
Developing the perfect ad, step by step

Top tip 7
Applying in-flight learning

Summary of top tips



Top tip 1 Using multiple touchpoints to engage and convert

When marketing a behaviour change intervention, the audience isn't always ready to act straight away. Initially, the job of the campaign may be to engage and build interest, rather than drive conversion. To address this, the Couch to Fitness team has developed the 'REPS' model to structure its campaigns, as outlined below.

What is REPS and how did Couch to Fitness apply it ?

Step 1 is to Reach and Engage the priority audience

This is about getting potential users to take the first step - in the case of Couch to Fitness, leaving their email address and signing up.

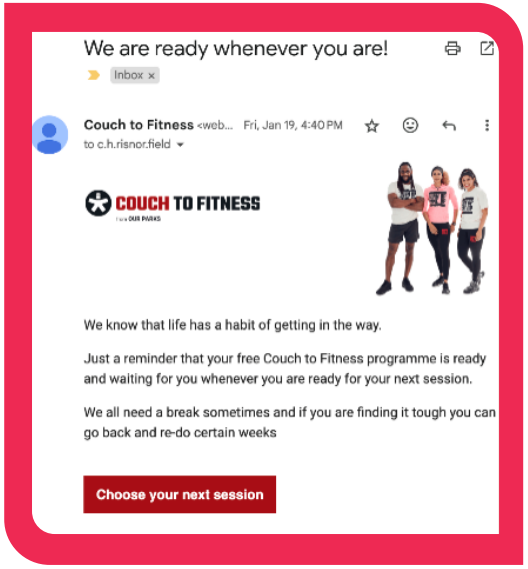
Reach and Engage ads focus on **building trust, removing barriers and encouraging users to take a small but concrete action**. To support this, Couch to Fitness has also used the COM-B model to ensure key barriers are understood and addressed, as outlined on the next page.

It may be that some are naturally ready to act and respond to direct marketing ads, however, very inactive audiences may need to **build trust and further understanding**. For this reason, Couch to Fitness uses **organic activity** to initiate a **long-term** relationship with those who might not yet feel ready to start. Remarketing ads have also been important to prompt those who have tentatively engaged with Couch to Fitness to come back again.

Step 2 is to Prompt and Support them to get started

This step is about providing **behaviour change support**, with the aim of getting potential users to take the next step. Prompt and Support ads focus on **encouraging** users to take their first workout class.

Couch to Fitness has learned to be **proactive** in prompting the audience on the journey to taking part in activity – for example by asking questions, providing social support and health benefits.



You could consider...

Structuring your campaigns to reflect the need to engage and build trust with parts of the audience who may be more distant from conversion.

* Link to references

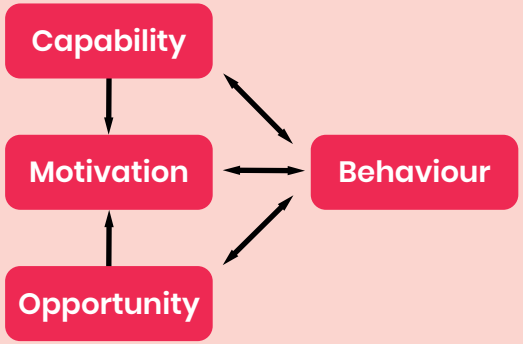
Top tip 2

Using customer insight as a foundation with the COM-B model

The COM-B model of behaviour change can be a particularly useful tool for understanding audience insight around barriers to activity and therefore is key when developing relevant messaging to test in your marketing campaigns. Having this insight helps you create campaigns that are relevant to the audience, and so are likely to resonate with them - see how Couch to Fitness did this below.

What is COM-B?

In order to carry out any behaviour, the COM-B model proposes that a person must feel psychologically and physically capable of it, have the social and physical opportunity to do it, and want or need to carry out the behaviour more than other competing behaviours (having the motivation to do it)*.



How Couch to Fitness used COM-B

Couch to Fitness leveraged the COM-B model to develop relevant messaging for its Cost of Living campaign. Barriers to physical activity identified in Sport England research** were categorised by each COM-B component, and messaging was created in response. These were then rolled out in digital creative to determine which would be most impactful.

Example barrier highlighted in research	Couch to Fitness messaging	COM-B factor
"There's too much on my mind to plan being active"	We offer a 9-week plan, led by expert instructors step-by-step, to make planning and scheduling workouts as easy as possible for those with busy lives.	Motivation
"I can't afford (financially) to be active"	It's free, with no one-off or ongoing costs, memberships or subscriptions, and no equipment required beyond an internet enabled device.	Opportunity
"I feel too tired for activity"	Our classes are designed to be achievable for everyone, whenever suits them, we even have 5 minute bitesize workouts if energy levels are low. We support people whether they feel up to a workout, or not.	Capability

You could consider...

Mapping your audience's barriers to the COM-B model to be sure to address key issues in the messaging you develop.

* Link to references

Top tip 3 Tailoring ads to different audiences

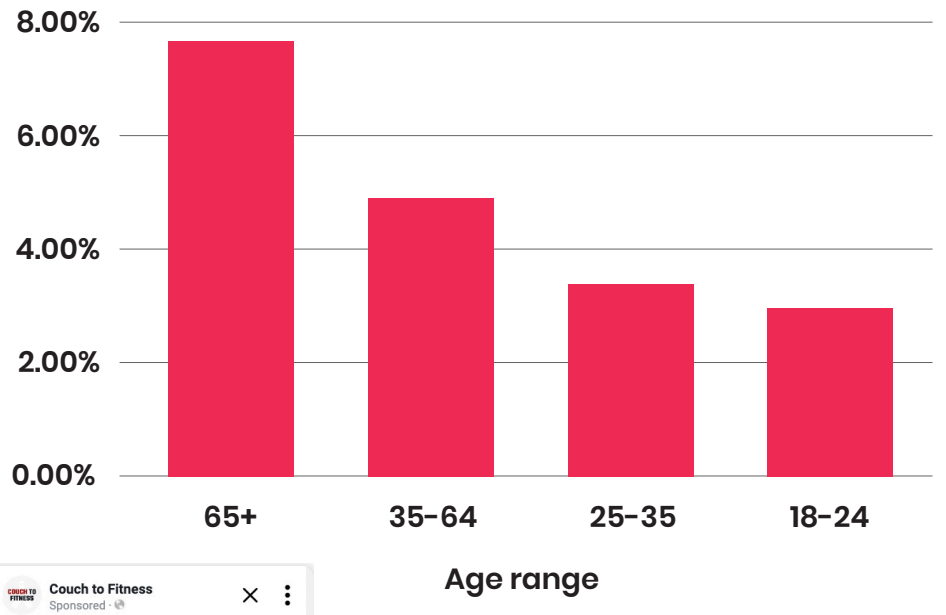
Tailoring the creative to the audiences can have a positive impact on campaign results and efficiencies

The Couch to Fitness team put significant time into making campaigns relatable to the targeted audience groups, by using photography to represent those groups via gender and age. For example, in the Cost of Living campaign, over 220 ads and assets were generated to ensure the campaign could be as tailored as possible. The aim was to ensure that the audience knew the programme was developed for them, and that it would feel accessible.

Insight also showed the importance of using authentic models in the ads. Couch to Fitness only photographed actual participants of the programme, wearing unbranded clothing in relatable settings, rather than any stock fitness images which can be off-putting for beginners and often show unrealistic body types, expensive clothing or flashy studios. See next page for some successful examples of this.

Results have shown the value of this work - men and women engaged better with ads that portray someone of the same gender and similar age, and with whom they could relate.

Click through rate by age: 'Helen' ad (older female)





You could consider...

Generating photography/creative for each key demographic being targeted, to determine whether more relatable imagery leads to greater campaign impact as it did for Couch to Fitness.

Top tip 3 cont.

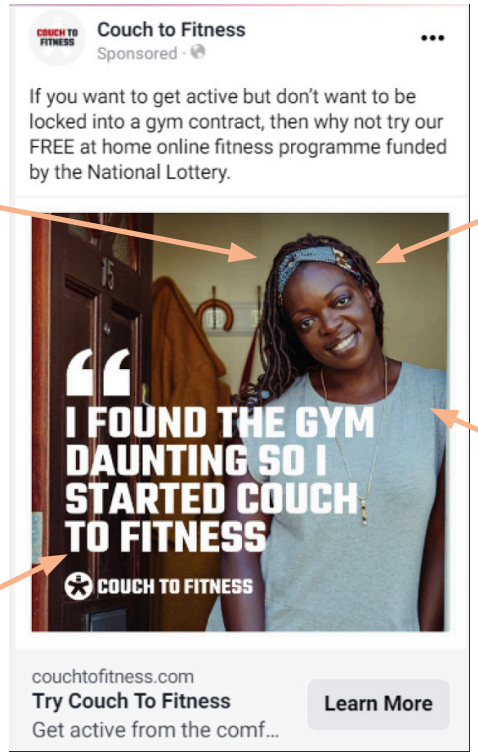
Dissecting Couch to Fitness imagery and creative

As highlighted earlier, a great deal of thought went into creating relatable imagery for the ads used in Couch to Fitness campaigns, indeed this approach forms part of the brand's identity outlined on page 17.

Below are two successful ads, indicating some of the features that made them work well for the target audience.

Face to camera imagery with eye contact

Testimonial style ad with authentic voice and emotive story



Actual participants of Couch to Fitness of varying ages and ethnicities

Relatable body types wearing unbranded clothing in a home environment or familiar setting



Key selling points clear

Reassuring language for beginners

Short, snappy text

Top tip 4 Defining the audience, channel by channel

Where does the audience spend time?

When developing channel strategy, it is important to consider where the target audience spends its time. For Couch to Fitness, Meta has been a reliable channel, driving the largest impact with the best efficiency. This is because a high proportion of the target audience spend time there, and because the platform provides advanced targeting features.

For larger campaigns or those with a specific focus, it may be important to explore additional channels. For example, Couch to Fitness placed creative in channels such as TikTok and Snapchat in order to reach younger women in the pre- and postnatal campaign who were more likely to use these platforms.

Defining the audience, channel by channel

Since channels offer different targeting tools, a channel-by-channel approach to audience definition is needed. Couch to Fitness puts detailed consideration into this area, often trialling a range of approaches depending on the tools available, e.g.,

- On Meta, leveraging behavioural, interest-based and demographic audience definitions, including using postcode as a proxy tool for lower income audiences.
- On Google, applying high-volume but low-competition keywords such as 'pregnancy workout'.
- On Snapchat and TikTok, users searching relevant hashtags or following relevant creators.



You could consider...

In your channel selection, taking into account (i) where your target audience spends time / consumes media and (ii) the targeting tools available – both of which impact media efficiency.

* Link to references

Top tip 5 Tailoring creative formats to channel norms

One size doesn't fit all when it comes to creative formats – tailoring to each channel's best practice has had a dramatic impact on ad performance for Couch to Fitness.

TikTok and Snapchat

Couch to Fitness' experience has been that creative works best with 'native' content, i.e., filmed and created within the TikTok app using the inbuilt features and editing software, without requiring professional camera equipment or editing. This ensures creative flows with other content on the app and prevents a jarring feeling compared to more 'produced' pieces.

Meta (Facebook / Instagram)

Couch to Fitness has achieved good performance with reel and still formats, and a mix of media has tended to perform better than leading with just one content type. In contrast, carousel ads typically perform better for product focussed ad and ecommerce remarketing ads.

Google

In terms of keyword success, Couch to Fitness has found the following principles to be impactful in the fitness space:

- Time-bound results, e.g., "Our 9-Week Fitness Programme"
- Similarity attractiveness, e.g., "For Beginners"

You could consider...

Taking a channel-by-channel approach and adopting channel best practice when developing creative formats. This Girl Can has some useful resources: Guidance and toolkits

Top tip 6

Developing the perfect ad, step by step

A methodical test and learn approach to identify strong performing ad elements can reap dividends and enable media spend to be deployed more effectively. At the start of any significant marketing activity, Couch to Fitness adopts a sequence of steps to identify the most impactful messages, creative formats, audiences and channels. Outlined below is an example from the Cost of Living campaign.

Note: timeline can be dependent on the level of media spend. For example, higher spend can mean getting data back faster and so phases can be shortened. Conversely with lower spend it might take longer to go through these phases.

Phase 1 (days 1-7)

Identifying the best performing messaging

Ads are tested and deployed with five messaging variations based on insight.

We identify the best performing motivations to take forward.

Phase 2 (days 8-10)

Identifying the best performing creative formats

Testing ad formats – video, still image, TikTok native, swipe-up stories, etc.

We identify the best performing creative formats to take forward.

Phase 3 (days 11-14)

Identifying the best performing audience groups

Exploring audience refinement or expansion – who is engaging most?

We identify the best performing audiences and can retire weaker ones.

Phase 4 (day 15)

Identifying the best performing channels

Exploring channel refinement – are any working less well?

We can shift budget from any underperforming channels.

Phase 5 (day 16)

'The perfect ad'

Moving forward into the rest of the campaign with the best performing motivations, creative formats, audiences and channels. We will still make ongoing optimisations for effectiveness (see next page).

You could consider...
Investing time upfront to create your perfect ad based on methodical testing of aspects such as imagery, messages and format.

Top tip 7 Applying in-flight learning

Employing a 'test and learn' approach allows you to 'see' the success of every activity and optimise

To enable this, Couch to Fitness marketing is designed in phases to ensure feedback informs subsequent activity, with key metrics under constant review, such as:

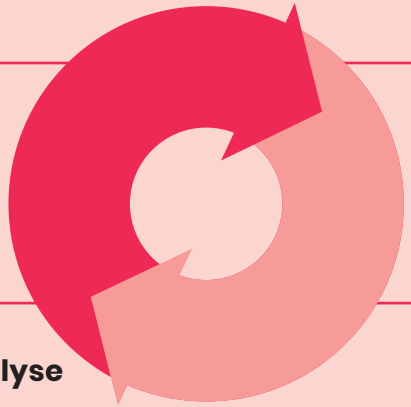
- Audience engagement with different creative formats
- Cost per click
- Registrations on Couch to Fitness / workouts started
- Time spent on the Couch to Fitness website

This ensures media spend is more efficient, with budget being placed behind the highest quality and best performing ads. It also allows the team to pick up on signs of saturation, or 'creative fatigue', and to respond with fresh creative if needed.

An allocated budget to experiment with new approaches may also be worth considering – for example, deploying 20% of the budget on adjacent audiences, new channels or retargeting. In the Cost of Living campaign, this enabled Couch to Fitness to reach new audiences not on Facebook via a trial of digital advertising on Sky TV. Inevitably, some experiments may not meet effectiveness goals, as was the case with a Couch to Fitness trial of Digital Audio Exchange (ads across Spotify / Amazon and other platforms) in the pre-and postnatal campaign.

Create an optimised test plan

1. Define target audiences, messaging, channels and creative formats based on the best or latest data.
2. Ensure most of the spend is directed to what's working well and redirect any that's not to other opportunities.



Deploy and analyse

Deploy spend in a staggered way. In each deployment, identify which audiences, messaging, channels and creative formats are working best and which are not working well enough.

You could consider...

- Designing a phased approach whereby the bulk of media spend benefits from learnings gained earlier on.
- Conducting regular optimisation to strengthen impact.

Summary of top tips: marketing to underserved audiences



Consider structuring your campaigns to engage and build trust over time with parts of the audience who may be more distant from conversion.



Map your audience's barriers to the COM-B model to be sure to address key issues in the messaging you develop.



Design a phased approach to your marketing campaign, whereby the bulk of media spend benefits from learnings gained earlier on.



In channel selection, take into account where your target audience spends its time and the targeting tools available.



Consider channel best practice as a starting point for developing creative formats.



Generate photography/ creative for each key demographic being targeted, to determine whether more relatable imagery leads to greater campaign impact.



Invest time upfront to create the perfect ad through step-by-step testing of aspects such as messages and format.



Once the campaign is live, conduct regular optimisation to strengthen its impact.

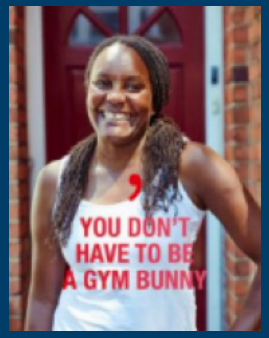
Appendix: Couch to Fitness campaigns

The next few pages provide more information about the main Couch to Fitness campaigns to date. Click below if you wish to jump to any of them directly.

1.

Initial offer launch campaign

Summer 2020



2.

couchtofitness.com campaign

April-May 2022



3.

Pre- and postnatal campaign

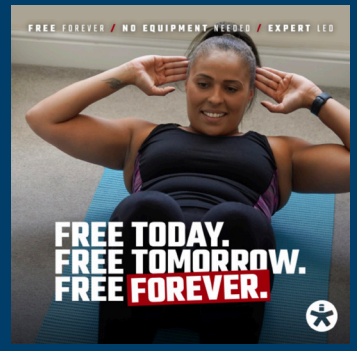
Summer 2022



4.

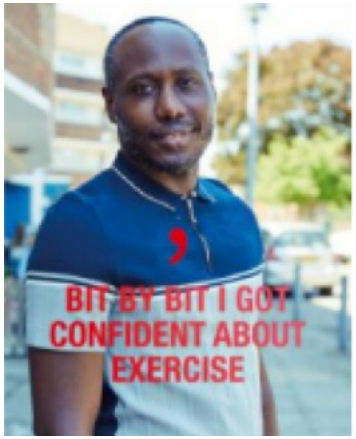
Cost of Living campaign

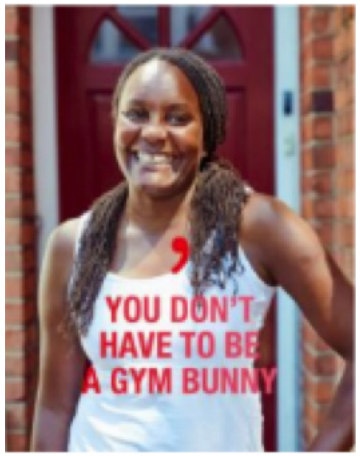
May 2023-April 2024



1. Initial offer launch campaign in Summer 2020: overview and results

The very first Couch to Fitness offer, an embedded YouTube playlist of workouts, was promoted alongside Couch to 5k via social media in the wake of Covid lockdown restrictions.





Marketing approach

Media: Paid media on Facebook and Instagram.

Objective: Promote the initial Couch to Fitness offer to the target audience alongside Couch to 5k and drive signs ups.

Target audience: Ethnically diverse audiences in lower socio-economic groups in London.

Approach: four audiences were created within the Meta platform based on postcodes with high proportions of ethnically diverse and low socio-economic populations. The campaign was divided into two phases:

1. Warm up ads: relatable and inspiring stories from real people who adopted the plan and succeeded.
2. First steps ads: messaging to address drivers and barriers.

Additionally, the team engaged with partners in the community to empower them to promote the campaign locally; activities included a webinar, workshop and toolkit.

Results

800k reach

50k driven to the site

19k signed up

The campaign exceeded its targets for reaching Londoners and reached a high proportion of people from ethnically diverse communities.

Ethnically diverse audiences engaged more with Couch to Fitness than with Couch to 5k.

See learnings and implications

1. Initial offer launch campaign in Summer 2020: learnings and implications

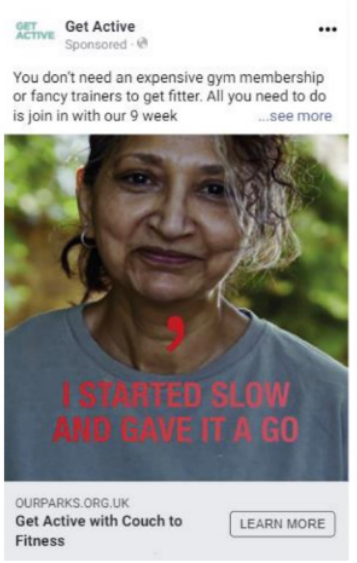
Our top learnings

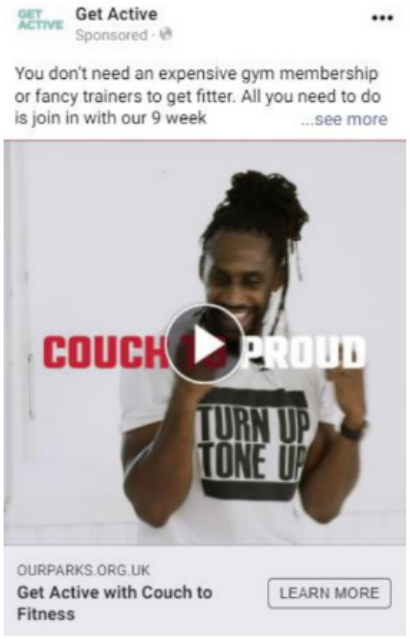
Overall strategy and planning

- A multi-phase campaign enabled the team to refine its approach while the campaign was still live, helping to optimise effectiveness.
- Postcode targeting via Facebook worked well to reach ethnically diverse and low socio-economic audiences.
- Certain audiences were more susceptible to saturation of content - it was therefore key to run short bursts of activity with constantly evolving creative assets and to provide clear calls to action, in order to maintain engagement.

Creative learnings

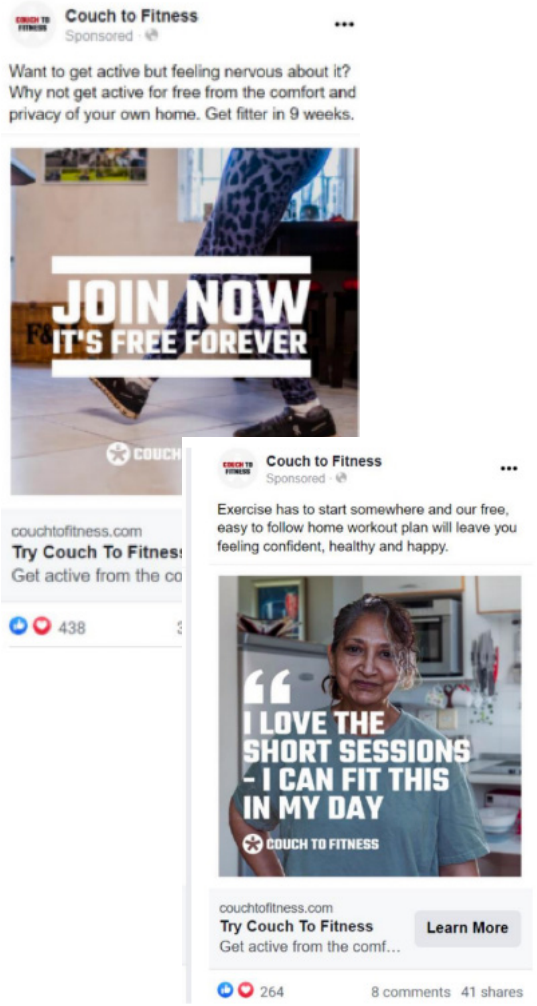
- The most effective ads conveyed people 'like' the target audience overcoming their barriers and getting active, e.g. "I started slow and gave it a go".
- Video content had highest engagement and was prioritised by the Facebook algorithm.
- Formats such as carousel images worked less well but were improved with the introduction of animation





2. couchtofitness.com campaign in April–May 2022: overview and results

Based on the success of the initial product, couchtofitness.com was created as a standalone website with a community support offer. A paid social media campaign promoted this redeveloped offer to inactive women.



Marketing approach

Media: Paid media on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google, TikTok and Snapchat.

Objective: Drive registration on the new Couch to Fitness website.

Target audience: Inactive women.

Approach:

- Facebook and Instagram were the hero channels, reflecting user behaviour. A comprehensive audience plan was developed through Meta targeting tools.
- Google search ads were set up based on high-volume, low competition keywords.
- YouTube ads acted as an awareness driver to fill the funnel for Google search and direct methods.
- TikTok and Snapchat ads were used to engage younger women.

Results

6.2 million reach

165k driven to the site

93.5k workouts

The campaign achieved a stronger click-through-rate compared to previous activity and industry averages. The proportion who started a workout was also strong. Over 9 in 10 users were female and most were not active.

See learnings and implications

2. couchtofitness.com campaign in April–May 2022: learnings and implications

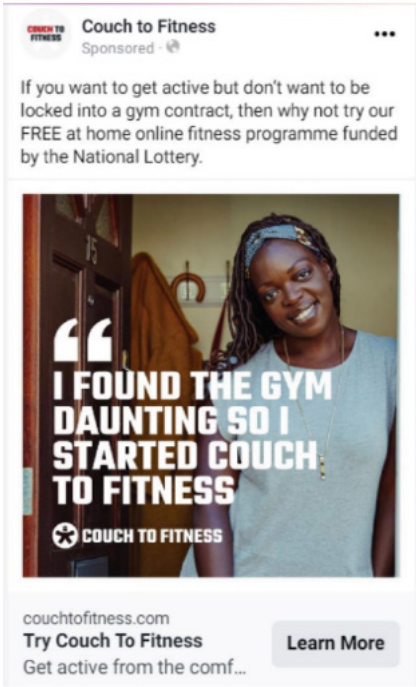
Our top learnings

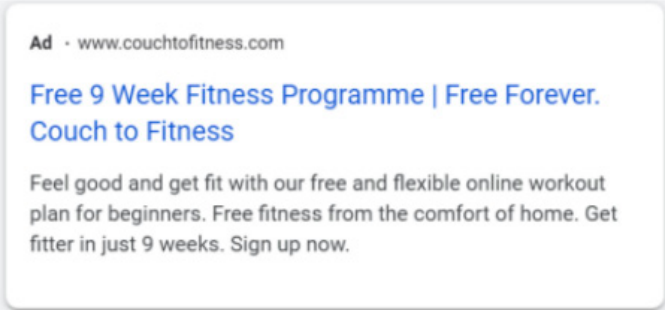
Overall strategy and planning

- The strongest performing channels were Facebook and Instagram. Google ads were the second highest performing channel with a low relative cost due to the strategy of using high-volume, low competition search terms.
- The rich targeting and analysis tools available on Meta and Google generated a raft of learnings that could be applied to subsequent campaign phases, including the most powerful audience definitions to apply and the best days and times to show the ads.
- Remarketing to those who had engaged with Couch to Fitness content also proved to be highly effective.

Creative learnings

- The best performing ads varied significantly by channel as the ads needed to be tailored to each of them; e.g. graphic ads didn't work as well on TikTok where more self-filmed/ testimonial pieces are expected.
- On Facebook and Instagram, the best performing ads either led with "Free forever" or included real people with emotive imagery and accessible language – e.g. "get active" rather than "get fit".
- Authenticity was critical: Couch to Fitness photographed real participants wearing normal clothes in relatable settings, rather than any classic fitness imagery.
- Clear and consistent branding and calls to action also helped drive conversion.



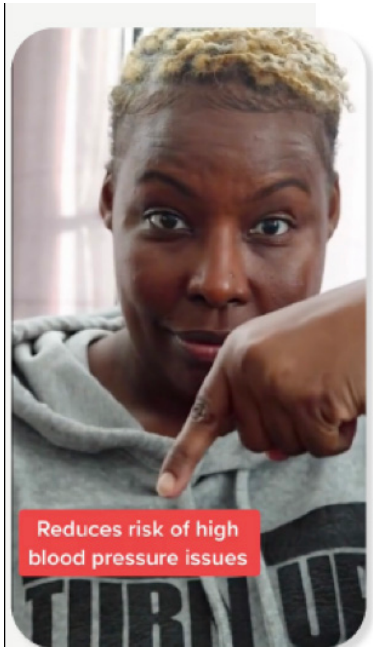


3. Pre and postnatal campaign in Summer 2022: overview and results

Summer 2022 saw the launch of new workout programmes for pregnant and postnatal women, in partnership with the Active Pregnancy Foundation.

The programmes were subsequently promoted in social media and press activity.





Marketing approach

Media: Paid media on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Google; digital audio ads on Spotify and elsewhere; Mumsnet ads; press.

Objective: Reach and encourage pregnant and postnatal women to sign up for the relevant Couch to Fitness workouts..

Target audience: A diverse, multi-demographic, temporary audience of pregnant and postnatal women.

Approach: based on existing insight, ad suites reflecting a range of audience motivations were deployed across multiple channels.

- Facebook, Instagram and TikTok: audiences of pregnant & postnatal women created based on interests and behaviours such as engagement with pregnancy-based websites.
- A Mumsnet display campaign to reach a high intent audience
- Google search ads set up based on high-volume, low competition keywords, targeted to mums.
- Digital audio ads targeted to listeners of pregnancy and newborn podcasts, and by postcode.

Results

4.1 million impressions

40k driven to the site

16k workouts

Among those who responded to the campaign and started a workout, 9 in 10 were new users of Couch to Fitness.

Cost per session was higher than previous activity due to the more niche and finite audience being targeted.

See learnings and implications

3. Pre and postnatal campaign in Summer 2022: learnings and implications

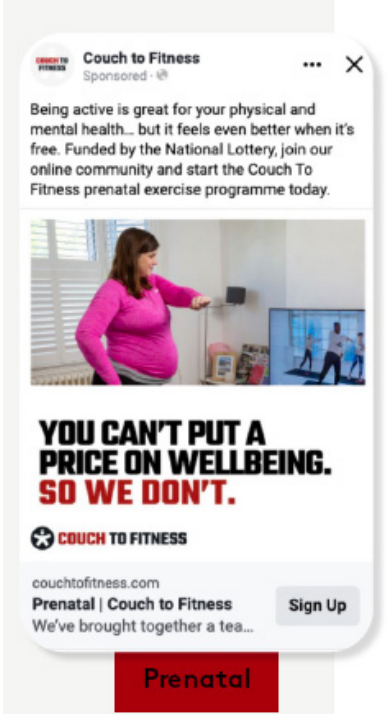
Our top learnings

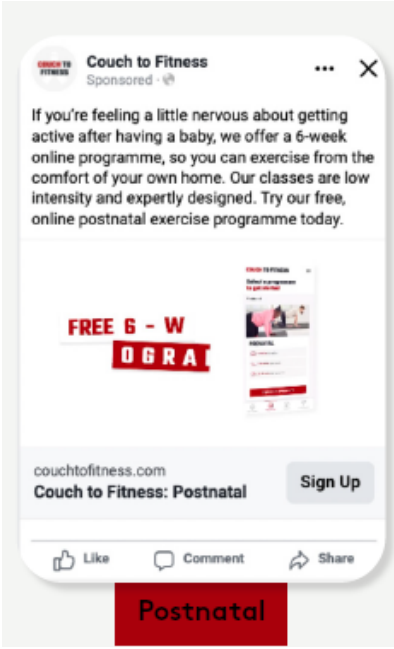
Overall strategy and planning

- A higher cost per session compared to other campaigns was to be expected due to the more niche and finite audience.
- Analysis tools on Meta and Google highlighted the best times of day to show the ads and the best performing audience definitions, meaning media spend could be re-directed to improve efficiency. In this case, demographic and behavioural definitions outperformed interest-based ones.
- Facebook was the most cost-efficient channel based on session numbers generated, but Google generated the best quality of site traffic based on time spent on Couch to Fitness.

Creative learnings

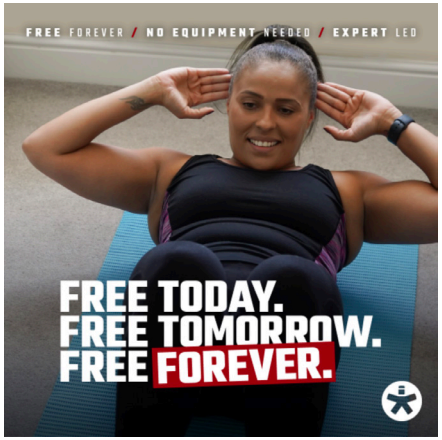
- Messaging tailored to audience insight tended to resonate best - research had highlighted that pre- and postnatal women were anxious about getting active, and many of the highest clicked ads spoke to those barriers. It was also important to message 'free' and 'convenience'.
- Depending on the channel, there can be a trade-off between reach and engagement. For example, display ads on Mumsnet generated lower traffic than other media formats, but those who did click were relatively likely to start a programme.
- TikTok performed at a higher level than previous Couch to Fitness activity due to the creation of ads more tailored to the channel, i.e., short and snappy videos created in-app, with trending songs and sounds from TikTok.





4. Cost of Living campaign in May 2023-April 2024: overview and results

Research published by Sport England in March 2023* identified changes in physical activity behaviours due to the rising cost of living, including a shift towards home-based activity. In response, Couch to Fitness initiated a paid media campaign to assert its key selling points.





Marketing approach

Media: Paid social media, Google and digital TV.

Objective: Encourage those in need to start Couch to Fitness.

Target audience: Those whose physical activity might have been affected by the rising cost of living.

Approach:

- Audience-centred message and ad development based on the COM-B model of behaviour change**.
- Several phases of activity with varying creative, allowing data to be captured and acted upon each time. In total over 220 ads were tested and 50 audience profiles were targeted.
- Media channels included Meta (Facebook & Instagram), TikTok, Snapchat, Google and digital TV.
- IMD and postcode data, where available, were used to target lower socio-economic groups.

Results

14 million impressions

3 million reach

23k signed up

11% of new visitors to the Couch to Fitness site became members and 41% were in the target audience group. Clicks were above industry standard.

The Facebook community support group also grew by 4k people.

See learnings and implications

* Link to references

4. Cost of Living campaign in May 2023-April 2024: learnings and implications

Our top learnings

Overall strategy and planning

- This campaign harnessed the REPS framework to Reach, Engage, Prompt and Support the primary audience. See page 26
- A test and learn approach meant each phase benefitted from prior learnings and many metrics improved over time.
- Digital TV was found to be a good medium for targeted ads, expanding reach to those without a presence on social media, and successfully driving both direct and indirect sign ups.
- Over time the team determined the optimal balance of audience types for impact and efficiency. This consisted of 70% budget on 'core audiences' who had the same demographic profile as current users, 20% budget to test new audiences such as males, and 10% budget for remarketing.
- Remarketing ads were essential to bring prospective users back with more impactful calls to action.

Creative learnings

- The COM-B model of behaviour change* was a powerful tool to develop messaging relevant to the rising cost of living. See how this was done on page 27
- Dual motivation ads were the highest performing, with 'flexibility' and 'free' the best combination. Ads focused on mental wellbeing also resonated.
- Audiences responded best to ads that looked 'like them' so having a broad image suite to cater to different groups was key.
- Snapchat and TikTok needed the personal touch. Videos that were more personal and testimonial-focused performed better than more generic, brand-focused videos.
- Collaborative posts with the well-known This Girl Can campaign added positive boosts to campaign performance.



* Link to references

References

Page 5
Source: Sport England Active Lives. 'Inactive' means under 30 minutes of qualifying physical activity per week.

*For information on NS SEC classes which are used to define socio-economic groups.

Page 8
Numbers at April 2024. Notes: (I) 'Total registrations' counts everyone who has registered their email with any Couch to Fitness product, (II) 'Users' counts everyone who has activated or migrated their account to couchtofitness.com

Page 13
Link to Sport England research.

Page 16
Research conducted in partnership with Loughborough University 2023

Page 19
* Link to Couch to Fitness research.
** Link to government evaluation.
*** Capability, opportunity and motivation relate to the COM-B model of behaviour change.

Page 20
Source: Couch to Fitness research
Capability, opportunity and motivation relate to the COM-B model of behaviour change.

Page 26
To read more about a Couch to Fitness campaign that used this approach see the **Initial offer launch campaign**.

Page 27
*Read more about COM-B

**Cost of living | Sport England

To read more about a Couch to Fitness campaign that used this approach see the **Cost of living campaign**.

Page 30
To read more about a Couch to Fitness campaign that used this approach see the **couchtofitness.com campaign**.

Page 42
* Cost of living | Sport England

** The COM-B model proposes that there are three components to any behaviour (B): Capability (C), Opportunity (O) and Motivation (M). In order to perform a particular behaviour, one must feel they are both psychologically and physically able to do so (C), have the social and physical opportunity for the behaviour (O), and want or need to carry out the behaviour more than other competing behaviours (M). Read more

Page 43
Read more about COM-B

Thank you!

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