



Arlee Newingham (White Mountain Apache), age 49

The Secrets to Getting Fit at Any Age

What motivates people to start getting fit when they are in their 40s and beyond? No, it's not wanting a trim waist and firm muscles. In fact, it's not about looks at all...

Paschal Johnson (White Mountain Apache), age 74





The secret motivator

Guess what inspires people to get fit when they are middle aged? No, it's not to be "looking good" at the next powwow. The number one motivator is fear: fear of not being able to take care of yourself, fear of becoming dependent on your children.

Arlee Newingham (White Mountain Apache) knows this. At age 48, she had arthritis in her knees. Some days she hurt so badly she could not drive.

Melanie Benjamin is the Chief Executive for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians. She decided to get fit at age 49 when she realized she needed to be a role model for tribal members. Her goal is for all tribal members to have better health and fewer cases of diabetes. "There's not one person on this reservation who is not affected by diabetes," she says. She works out at the tribe's fitness center with the help of Jim Ingle, Mille Lacs Fitness Coordinator.

"My son had to drive me to the hospital," she recalls. Arlee thought, "I'm getting old. I can't get fit at my age."

But the fear of being a burden on her son was too great. She knew she had to get

rid of the arthritis, so she wouldn't be helpless. So at age 48, Arlee started working out. In a few weeks, her arthritis started going away. In nine months, the arthritis was gone and she had lost 40 pounds.

Other big fears

For Paschal Johnson (White Mountain Apache), it was the fear of getting diabetes that helped him start to get fit at age 65. His mother died of diabetes. About ten years ago, his daughter found out she had diabetes. Paschal says, “That’s why I started working out. I didn’t want to get diabetes.” He had also been slowly gaining weight and losing strength. He wanted to be able to stay strong, to take care of himself, his children and grandchildren.

Now at age 74, Paschal is so strong, he can lift his grandchildren in the air with his legs, but only if they weigh 300 pounds or less! He doesn’t need a family member to pick him up and drive him to a gathering. Not only can he drive, he can easily *run* three miles to a family event! And Paschal is diabetes-free.

Like Paschal, Jim Kalk (Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe) wanted to stay strong. He was having a hard time getting out of bed and bending over to tie his shoes. “I knew I had to do something because I was too fat,” he says.

He noticed he drove around parking lots over and over, looking for close parking spots so he wouldn’t have to walk. He noticed how a highlight of his day was lying on the couch with the remote. “I was getting lazy.”

When Jim was 44, he walked into the fitness center.

Jim Ingle, the tribal fitness coordinator, invited him to work out. The timing was just right.

Within several months, he lost 40 pounds. His body fat fell from 27 percent to 16 percent. His pants size went from 42 to 36.

Being a role model

Another strong motivator is the desire to be a role model.

Melanie Benjamin is the Chief Executive of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Two years ago, in her annual State of the Band address, Melanie talked about the value of spiritual, mental, emotional and physical wellness. She knew she had to listen to her own words. “I made a commitment to fitness,” she says. She started working out right

away, at age 49. Now, she brings her grandchildren with her to go swimming. “It’s my responsibility to set a good example.”

Paschal is also a role model, especially to Elders. At the fitness center, he teaches Elders how to use the equipment. He doesn’t have to say much. When he walks, he stands straight, and holds his head up. He explains, “I feel so good, as an individual and as an Elder. I feel young at heart. I call it high self-esteem.”

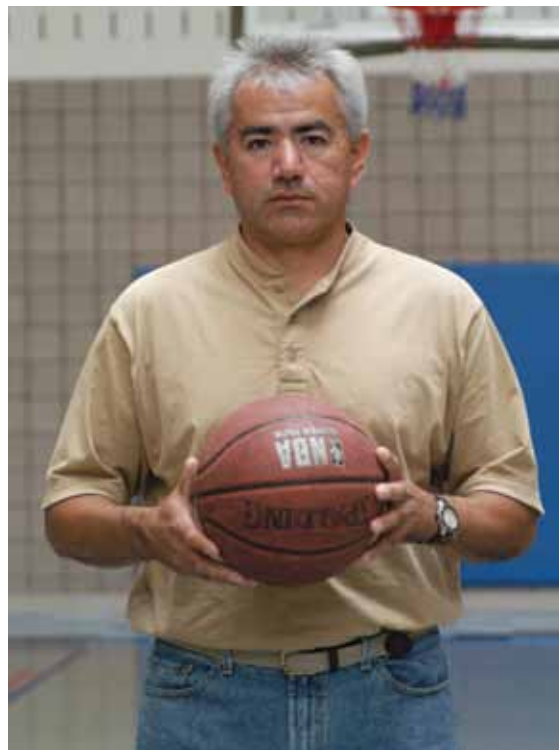
He makes us want to cheer!

What gets in the way

Even if you are motivated to start working out, some things can get in the way such as depression and a lack of facilities.

“When you are depressed, you can’t get the energy to work out,” says Melanie. She says depression is deeply rooted. For many

Jim Kalk (Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe) says his decision to start working out at age 44 was not a “life-altering experience.” One day, the tribe’s fitness coordinator asked him to work out. Jim said yes because, “I was too fat.”



Native Americans, depression comes from generations of hardship and pain. She says ways to overcome depression are through spending time with Elders, learning from their wisdom, and returning to traditions. “Traditions, culture and language have to go hand-in-hand with physical health,” she says.

Also, when there is a fitness center with friendly staff, it is easier for people to get fit. At Mille Lacs, there is a fitness center that offers free personal training.

The biggie—what will people think?

No matter how motivated you are, when you go to the gym for the first time, it can be scary. Arlee calls it, “The Intimidation Factor.” One of her biggest fears was that people would look at her. “I’m overweight,” she recalls thinking. “What are these people going to think?”

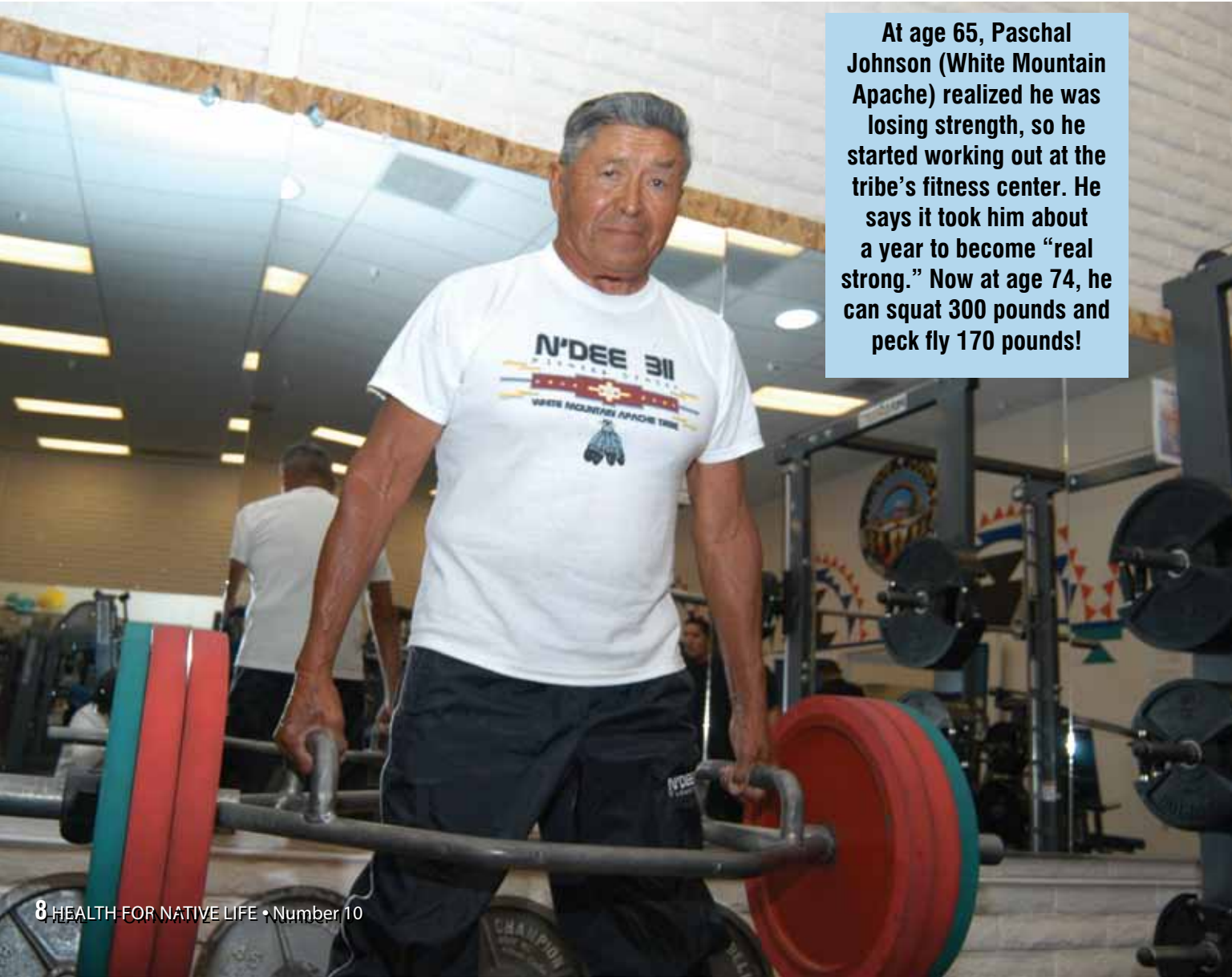
Arlee quickly realized people at the gym were not interested in her. They were focused on themselves. “I told myself not to be intimidated. I

told myself that I was in charge of my own health.”

Paschal agrees. His advice is to not focus on the people with the big muscles. “Don’t think about them. Just think of your own health.”

The “buff” factor

Arlee, Paschal, Jim and Melanie all started getting fit for the same reasons. They want to live long, healthy, independent lives. They don’t want to burden their children



At age 65, Paschal Johnson (White Mountain Apache) realized he was losing strength, so he started working out at the tribe’s fitness center. He says it took him about a year to become “real strong.” Now at age 74, he can squat 300 pounds and peck fly 170 pounds!

by being unable to walk, or by getting arthritis or diabetes. They want to be positive role models.

No one said “looking good” was their reason to start getting fit. But, it still happened. Says Jim, “Someone told me I *almost* look buff!”

Paschal says, “People think I’m in my 50s or 60s.” (Remember, Paschal is 74!)

Arlee has lost so much weight, people sometimes don’t recognize her. Although she likes her new, trim shape, she

feels better about something else. “It’s a good thing to do something you didn’t think you could do.” ❖

Arlee says, “If someone told me nine months ago that I’d be smiling for a photo for a fitness article, I would have never believed them!”



Jim Kalk—Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

The last straw: “I got tired of the fat around my midsection. Friends my age had more energy than me.”

The surprise benefits: “Working out helps me get rid of stress. I have more energy, and I can concentrate better. I enjoy using a push mower to mow the yard! When I hunt, I can easily drag a deer out of the woods.”

What people say: “They tell me I have better posture.”



Melanie Benjamin—Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

The last straw: “I like to shop. One day I realized I was comfortable buying a size that I never wanted to fit into.”

Her key to not gaining weight every year: “Discipline.”

Her next step to being fit: “I want to eat more traditional foods.”

What keeps her exercising: “Sometimes it’s a struggle to go to the health center. But once I’m finished working out, I feel great!”



Arlee Newingham—White Mountain Apache

What happened: “The first time on the exercise ball, I rolled off! I had to put it in the hallway between the walls so I wouldn’t roll off!”

What changed: “My frame of mind. I’m not saying it’s easy. But it’s not hard either.”

The nine-month thing: “It took me nine months to lose 40 pounds and get fit. It’s the same amount of time to have a baby!”

Her fitness tip: “Keep it up for six weeks. You’ll form a new habit. It will be automatic!”



Paschal Johnson—White Mountain Apache

His routine: “I weight train and sometimes do cardio exercise. Sometimes I walk home. It’s miles from the gym.”

How he does it: “It’s hard for me to work out. But I just discipline myself. Even when I have lazy days, I just go.”

The age he thinks he’ll stop working out: “No one is too old to work out. I’ll still be here in the gym when I’m 90!”



When Paschal Johnson first saw the rock, he could not pick it up. It was many years ago, when he was riding horseback on the Apache Trail, working cattle with ten other young men. “It was the only rock on the prairie,” says Paschal.

The Story of the Rock

He did not see the rock for 40 years. After Paschal’s uncle passed away, he was cleaning up some of his belongings when he found it. Paschal knew the rock was special.

He had learned that its Apache name means “The rock that gets carried.” It has indented handles carved in each side. One side is slightly heavier. If you are strong enough to lift it, the handles and the weight imbalance work together so the rock rolls right into your lap. Then you carry it. The rock weighs 238 pounds.

The rock has been used for centuries. Warriors prayed and sang over the rock to gain strength to be able to pick it up and carry it. “It gives you courage and strength in your mind, body and spirit,” says Paschal. “Geronimo and

Cochise carried the rock.”

Now the rock sits in the front room of the N’Dee Bii Fitness Center on the White Mountain Apache Reservation. Elders come in to see it. Like Paschal, they have not seen it for 40 years.

It motivates men to get stronger. Many are weight training to be able to carry it. “It challenges men. It helps us stay strong,” says Paschal.

Soon the rock will go to the tribe’s museum. The medicine man will say a prayer. It will be taken to the Apache Trail. From there, the rock will resume its travels. Man by man, it will be carried to the north, towards the Big Dipper. And each man will come away stronger in mind, body and spirit.



Try Arlee’s Food Program: It Includes: Frybread, French Fries and Fritos!

When Arlee Newingham (White Mountain Apache), nutrition technician, started her job at the N’Dee Bii Fitness Center, she weighed 40 pounds more.

People came in to get help to lose weight, and Arlee told them about cutting back on calories, fat and carbohydrates. She told them about eating more fresh vegetables and fruits.

Arlee realized she needed to change her own eating habits to give advice to others about how to eat healthily. “I put myself on the program,” she explains.

By listening to her own words, Arlee saw she was eating huge portions. She liked large servings

of frybread, French fries and Fritos. She ate when she felt tired or sad. “I used to eat for comfort. Food was my friend,” she says.

So Arlee put herself on a *lifelong program*, not a *diet*. She knows she cannot give up the food she loves. She eats what she wants, just smaller portions.

“I eat 4-inch pieces of frybread. When I eat French fries, I eat ten. When I eat Fritos, I eat ten chips,” she says.

She also knows she needs to take care of her emotions. She talks often with family and friends. She rarely eats fried foods to feel better. She goes to the gym instead. “Now, water and physical activity are my friends!”



When Arlee eats frybread, she eats a 4-inch piece.

Her new way of eating works because she never feels deprived. Arlee says, “I can eat whatever I want! I’ve gone through the program. It works!”



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