




Change Your Life

“It’s so simple!”

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36 HEALTH FOR NATIVE LIFE • Number 14



**Melva Withers and
six other Alaska
Native Peoples tell
their amazing stories
of changing their
lifestyles and losing
176 pounds.**

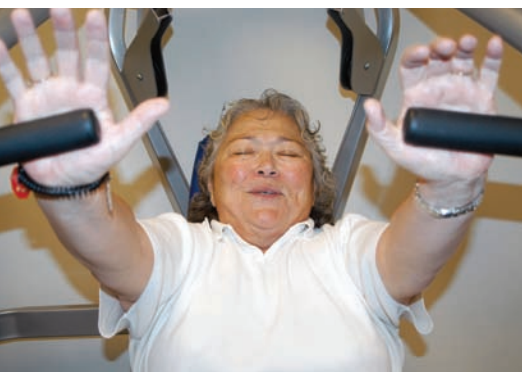
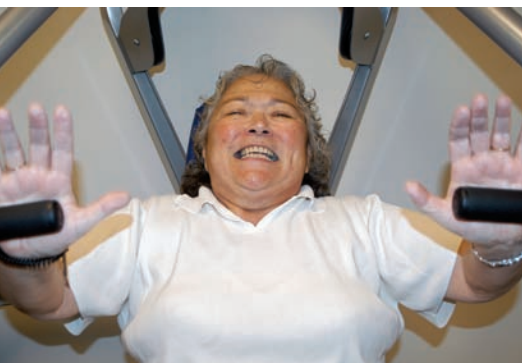
The fitness room at the Southcentral Foundation Wellness Center teems with determination. The meeting room bubbles over with laughter, tears, heart-wrenching true words, and again, determination. These Alaska Native Peoples are warm and welcoming yet tough, and have a “just get ‘er done” attitude. Seven of them share their stories. Together, these seven lost a whopping 176 pounds! For some, the weight loss has enabled them to prevent diabetes. For those with diabetes, losing weight has lowered their blood sugars to ranges of people without diabetes.





LOST 45 POUNDS

Melva Withers:
“I thrive on
exercise.”



“There is a
way out of this
sticky web of
diabetes, but
it’s up to you.”

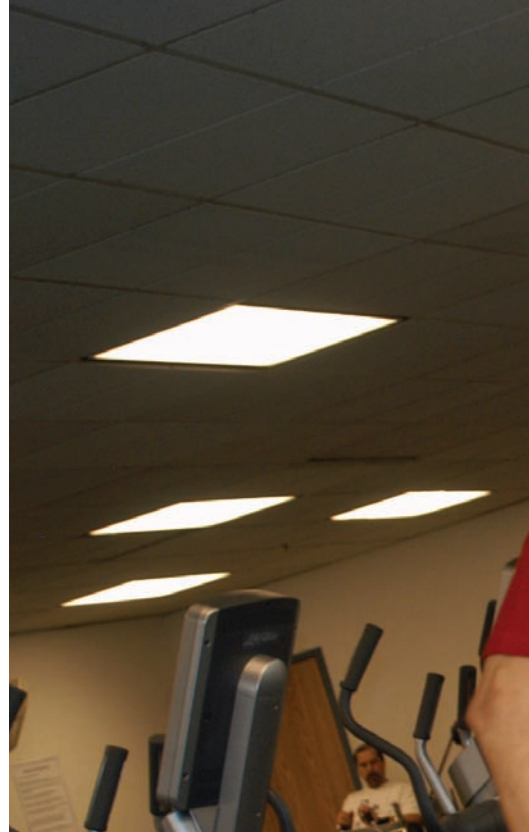
Melva Withers
(Athabaskan)

“In 1999, I found out I had diabetes. At the time my knees were going out, and I needed a cane to walk. At the medical center, I learned that exercise could mend this old body. I found out that exercise is the key. I found out I can control diabetes. *I am the person who has to take care of my body. It is up to me to stay well. It’s so simple.*

“For example, today I exercised for one hour and 20 minutes. I exercise twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. I thrive on exercise. I’ve learned how to eat fewer carbs. I eat 45 grams for each meal. I eat healthy, whole grain carbs or fresh fruit.

“**My blood sugar levels have gone down.** In the morning, they used to be 140. Now they are 90-110.

“I live in my body. I have to do it right. Now I don’t need a cane. I’m 70 years old, and every day is good. **I am fit and able to do what I did when I was 50.**” ●



“I don’t know
if I can avoid
diabetes forever,
but I hope for
the best.”

Alan Williams
(Tlingit/Haida)





LOST 45 POUNDS

Alan Williams: Determined and Disciplined to Stop Diabetes in Its Tracks

About a year ago, Alan Williams (Tlingit/Haida) found out he was “borderline diabetic.” This is a common term used for having a condition called prediabetes.* Southcentral Foundation Wellness Center staff helped Alan learn that **exercise could change the course of his future.** If he exercised, changed his eating, and lost some weight, he could take a detour from heading straight to diabetes. He started working out at the fitness center. He worked up

to walking on a treadmill (one and a half hours!) and lifting weights five days a week. **He went from 240 pounds to 195 pounds.**

“You have to be disciplined. You have to control your food portions. I have lowered my numbers. My blood sugar is usually below 110, and **my blood pressure is 95 over 65.** I know if this wellness center wasn’t here, I would be bigger. I would weigh 240. It has helped me change my lifestyle.”

*Prediabetes

Prediabetes is sometimes called borderline diabetes, impaired glucose tolerance (IGT), or impaired fasting glucose (IFG). It is when a person’s blood sugar is higher than normal, but not high enough to have diabetes. People with prediabetes are at risk for getting type 2 diabetes in 5-10 years. By making changes, people with prediabetes can prevent or delay getting diabetes.

Make small changes

Start with small changes in eating and exercise. Small changes can lead to bigger changes that you can stick with.

Lose weight

Lose about 10-15 pounds, or around seven percent of your current weight.

There is a simple blood test that can check for prediabetes. Talk to your health care provider. To find out more about prediabetes go to: diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/prediabetes_ES/ or www.diabetes.org/prediabetes.jsp.





Mary Underwood: Information is Power

Mary Underwood (Athabascan) has prediabetes. She has learned information is power. She has learned that she can prevent diabetes.

When she started learning about what high blood sugar does in a person's body, she found it easy to make lifestyle changes. **"I learned real information, not scare tactics.** I learned how high blood sugar affects a person's heart, eyes, kidneys, and limbs. The information was sobering."

What Mary learned immediately changed the way she viewed food. Mary likes to cook and realized many of the recipes she used contained high fat or high sugar. **"I learned how to change a recipe and make it healthy,"** she says.

This new knowledge impacted what Mary thinks about every time she eats. "I think about the fat and sugar content of what I am eating. I buy a grilled chicken sandwich without mayo instead of a double cheeseburger."

Mary also learned about the health benefits of exercising. "I've seen it with my own eyes," she says. "I rode a stationary bike for 20 minutes, and my blood sugar dropped 20 points."

This inspired Mary to be more active. **She rides a stationary bike every day for 30 minutes, walks, and swims.** "I would have never done this without seeing and understanding the benefits. I hate exercise.

It's a battle for me to do it. But the information gave me discipline." ●



"Money can buy you almost anything. But, it won't buy you good health and longevity. Diet and exercise does!"

Mary Underwood
(Athabascan)



LOST 14 POUNDS

Angie Santa Ana: Overcoming the Addiction of Food

Angie Santa Ana (Cup'ig) has three children. When she was pregnant with her last child, Angie had gestational diabetes.* Now Angie has prediabetes.

"When I was younger, I drank alcohol. **I think when you have one addiction, and that stops, you move on to something else.** I think my body is addicted to white flour and sugar. I learned from my college instructor that we can get addicted to certain foods. It's easy to do because in the world we live in, so many foods are heavily processed."

"I've lost weight in unhealthy ways before. Now, I am learning I can lose weight in a healthy way. I learned that if I walk on a treadmill and burn 200 calories, and do that several times a week, I can lose weight. That is pretty amazing! **It is amazing to know that I can take care of my body, my temple.**" ●

"I learned I could put a thought in my head, like walking on the treadmill, and then do it."

Angie Santa Ana (Cup'ig)

**Free Radicals and Antioxidants

Free radicals are chemicals in the body that come from smoking, pollution, poisons, fried foods, and other foods. They can damage healthy cells and increase the risk of diseases.

Antioxidants are chemical compounds that can bind to free radicals. This prevents the free radicals from damaging healthy cells. Antioxidants can be found in many foods, especially:

- berries
- broccoli
- tomatoes
- red grapes
- garlic
- spinach
- tea
- carrots
- soy
- whole grains

“I no longer consider myself a prediabetic.”

Arlene Manook
(Athabaskan)



LOST 16 POUNDS

Arlene Manook: Life Without Cheese is Great!



“Six years ago I found out I had prediabetes, and I started to go to diabetes education classes. I didn’t go for the information. I wanted the incentives,” recalls Arlene Manook (Athabaskan).

“Even though I had prediabetes, and diabetes runs in my family, I didn’t think I was at risk for developing diabetes. I had always been active, so I couldn’t believe I was at risk. These were all my thoughts when I first started going to diabetes prevention classes. I was skeptical when I first started learning about how to prevent diabetes.”

Slowly, the information began to sink in. Arlene started to go to the classes not just for the incentives, but because she wanted more information.

“The most important thing I learned was that **small changes in my diet could make a huge difference.**

I learned to keep track of what I eat in a book. I learned to look up foods in a fat and calorie guide. Then I started exercising 30 minutes a day.”

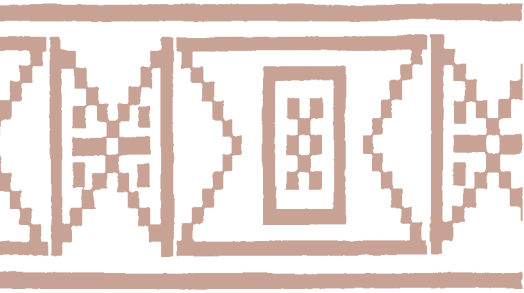
Arlene lost 16 pounds.

Now when she looks back she says, “When I think about how I used to eat, I feel sick because I know what I was doing to my body. I used to eat a lot of fats, like potato chips and cheese. Cheese was my downfall. Now I know that cheese turns into stuff that clogs your arteries and sticks to your heart. I don’t even eat cheese any more.”

Arlene’s understanding of how food affects the body has become quite in-depth. “Free radicals** are so bad for you. **I eat foods that have antioxidants**** because they cling to the free radicals and help the body get rid of them. I eat blueberries every day because they have antioxidants.” ●

*Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes happens when a pregnant woman has high blood sugar. Having gestational diabetes can create problems for the baby and mother. But controlling blood sugar can help. Most babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes are healthy. Gestational diabetes goes away once the baby is born. But women who had gestational diabetes are at higher risk for developing diabetes.



“I want longevity. I want to live until 85, at least. I guess I’m selfish!”

Donald Harper
(Athabaskan)



LOST 35 POUNDS

Donald Harper: Wanting More of a Good Thing

When Donald Harper (Athabaskan) sat in on his first diabetes wellness class, he was surprised. “I wasn’t aware that Big Macs, soda pop, and fast foods contribute to diabetes,” he recalls. That was over eight years ago.

Now Donald has cut back on fast foods and pop. He walks two days a week. He goes to the gym three days a week and does cardio and lifts weights. **“Exercise is the key to managing diabetes,”** he says.

Donald has always paid

attention to people and programs that help him. He says the people at the Southcentral Foundation Wellness Center are always cheerful and give him positive feedback. **“They tell me to keep up the good work.** It makes me want to come here,” he says.

Being well with diabetes reminds him of recovering from alcoholism. “God helped me with sobriety, so I thought, ‘I want more of that.’ It is the same with this diabetes wellness program. **It has helped me, and I want more of it.”**





LOST 21 POUNDS

Beverly Austin-Orr: No Prediabetes Means No Diabetes

Beverly Austin-Orr (Tlingit) was headed for diabetes, and it scared her. She has relatives who have it. One relative is only in her late 30s. “I was diagnosed with prediabetes two years ago. I didn’t even know prediabetes existed. I knew that diabetes could actually kill you. I was alarmed.”

Beverly has a lot to live for: she has four biological children and 10 adopted children. Beverly knows that diabetes runs in families and that Native Americans and Alaska Native Peoples have a higher risk for diabetes. **“My children have learned through me that diabetes can be prevented,”** she says.

She role models how to prevent diabetes. “I eat healthy foods. I’m active. I get up early and exercise. Sometimes I exercise four hours a day, two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. When I don’t put in the four hours, my muscles feel sore. **I have so much energy, I don’t know what to do with it all.”**



My family and this program’s information gave me the courage to change my lifestyle. I have beat diabetes.”

Beverly Austin-Orr (Tlingit)



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