



Elder Visions

Newsletter of the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

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Not Too Late for New Year's Resolution

In one horrible way, Indian country is fully in step with, or perhaps even one step behind, the rest of America: obesity is rampant; in varying degrees, diabetes is a scourge upon all tribes. Too many of us are in sad physical shape.

Resolved in this new year; let's get smart, get healthy; eat well and in moderation; lay off alcohol and drugs; and exercise. While we are at it; let's treat each other better; seek inner peace; let's try to be happy.

As PGA Pro Notah Begay III stressed recently at the NCAI convention: "My mother always stressed to me, when you have difficulties, reflect on your culture."

Acknowledging that diabetes is quickly becoming the greatest killer of Indian people, Begay vowed to be an advocate in the fight for a healthy Indian country. Or as NCAI president Tex Hall told the same audience: "Healthy is hot! Treaties, not diabetes!"

The vision is one of health, of a fit and trim Indian people. The hope and the wish is for an Indian people who feel good from the power of self-love and the privilege of good wind in the lungs, strong legs, good digestion, good relations and the inner grit that can

feed spirit. For those fortunate ones born into healthy bodies, a reminder to value the gift, to resolve to care for and use our bodies to good cause. Strengthen rather than weaken yourselves, so that your strength may help your relatives-old and young-who need you.

We offer this vision of healthy body and healthy spirit as the greatest of our aspirations, and as the most proper common resolution we can muster. It is probably the greatest common challenge of our peoples and certainly, we are not in the least alone in this heartfelt wish.



Throughout Indian country, numerous tribes, projects and individuals have taken up the battle represented by poor diet, obesity and the often resulting adult onset diabetes, the tragic scourge that was virtually unknown in our communi-

ties before 1900 but now attacks hundreds of thousands of our people, even very young children. This growing new consciousness was gratifyingly evident at the NCAI, where participants shared a long walk to raise health and fitness awareness and to make the point that we are all in this together. It is evident among many tribal projects developing what scholar Gary Nabhan calls "foods with true American roots."

Continued on Page 2

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Continued from Page 1

Not Too Late for New Year's

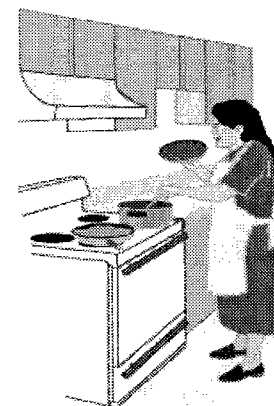
There is a growing consciousness of the positive health impact of good food on our people. Across Indian country, many tribes are committing to the process of recovering our health through our traditional knowledge of food. More and more tribes maintain their own seed banks now while family and even tribal gardens are coming back.

Among the Haudenosaunee, the Indian corn cuisine is in a revival as part of the get-healthy movement. The emphasis is to preserve the old seed, to prepare healthy foods for balanced nutrition, and to have pride in one's culture. Projects such as Daybreak Farming and Food Project, the Pinewoods Community Chefs Collaborative and others have generated growing interest in the value of the traditional foods. From the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, Quebec, for instance, a Diabetes Wampum Belt has traveled more than 1,500 miles to more than a dozen communities. Carried by walkers, bicyclists, canoes and runners, the message of the belt is health.

Marietta King, Blackfeet, is among Indian authors making a contribution. Her book, "Native American: Food is Medicine," explores the prevention and control of diabetes and hyperinsulinemia. It introduces the "Renewal of Life: Food Journal," which assists people in tracking their daily intake of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. "Nobody wants to give up fry bread," she says. "But there are ways to prepare it so it's not so harmful to us."

Among Southwestern Native communities, Native Seeds/SEARCH and the Seed Savers Exchange have re-propagated hundreds of varieties of American Indian corn, beans, squash, chilies and other foods and medicines. Many of these were nearly extinct. At Gila River, Arizona, where the Native population suffers extremely high rates of diabetes, the new Kai restaurant, which opened in October 2000, offers food prepared from traditional Native crops and many foodstuffs grown on the reservation.

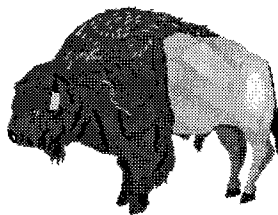
At Pine Ridge, South Dakota, Billy Mills' Running Strong for American Indian Youth programs assist in preparing the ground for nearly 500 family gardens every summer. For many, their own gardens constitute



Continued on Page 3

Not Too Late for New Year's Resolution

the only source of fresh vegetables. Nutritionists call many traditional foods, such as beans, acorns and mesquite "slow release foods." They are more slowly digested and thus absorbed by the body in more efficient and healthy ways.



The 52 Native nations that participate in the InterTribal Bison Cooperative aim to restore buffalo herds on Indian tribal lands. Since 1990 they have worked successfully to expand and build buffalo projects. But theirs is not simply a commercial effort; it involves the continuity and recovery of culture and good health through the proper relation with an animal considered sacred by numerous tribes. Buffalo meat, particularly that of grass-fed animals, is low in fat and high in energy. We cannot overstate the importance and necessity of these many fine Indian country programs and initiatives.

Collaboration between food production, good nutritional education and vigorous exercise programs is also crucial. The federal government must help more. It is after all responsible for the large-scale destruction on Indian economies and self-sufficient cultures, the foundations of healthy American Indian food production. The government is by treaty and policy, responsible for Indian health. But according to a Civil

Rights Commission report, the government spends about \$5,000 per capita each year for health care for the general U.S. population and \$3,803 for federal prisoners, but only \$1,914 per capita for Indian health care.

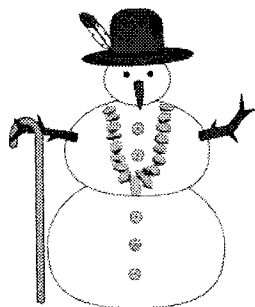
The list goes on. The link between good food and good health is becoming more known. Eating more native and natural foods is one half the strategy of health and nutrition. Exercise, breaking a sweat, is the other requisite. Highly recommended in this context; "Rez-Robics" a funny and very useful video for and by Indians by DreamCatchers Inc. and Navajo Health Promotions.

The growing movement toward a healthy lifestyle in Indian country is very welcome. In 2004, let's exercise; let's eat right; let's restore the strength of good health to our present and future generations.

Note: According to its Web site, Indian communities can receive free copies of "Rez-Robics" by sending a self-addressed box or padded envelope big enough for two VHS videotapes along with five dollars worth of postage stamps (no meter labels) to DreamCatchers Inc., 23852 PCH #766, Malibu, CA 90265. For more information, visit www.dreamcatchers.org or e-mail rhino@kifaru.com. ■

Is it hard to stay warm?

Watching the Temperature



Anyone can get hypothermia, but seniors are especially vulnerable, according to the National Institute on Aging. Risk factors include being under weight. Certain medications can also make it hard to stay warm. If the condition is suspected, take the individual's temperature and call 911 if the reading is at or below 96 degrees.

And if the individual is cold because he or she is trying to save on heating costs, contact the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program at (866) 674-6327. ■

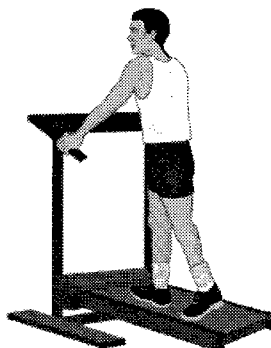
For starters, it's one of the safest things you can do with your body

Walk, Don't Run!

You want to get healthy. You know you need to exercise more. But if you're not ready to grunt through an hour of running or kickboxing, don't despair. There's growing agreement among exercise researchers that the intense physical activities offered by most health clubs are not the only-or even the preferable-path to better health. Indeed, the best thing for most of us may be to just walk.

Yes, walk. At a reasonably vigorous clip (three to four m.p.h.) for half an hour or so, mabe five or six times a week. You may not feel the benefits all at once, but the evidence suggest that over the long term, a regular walking routine can do a world of preventive good.

Walking, in fact, may be the perfect exercise. For starters, it's one of the safest things you can do with your body. It's much easier on the knees than running and doesn't trigger untoward side effects. "Regular physical activity is probably as close to a magic bullet as we will come in modern medicine," says Dr. JoAnn Manson, chief of preventive medicine at Harvard's Brigham and



Women's Hospital. "If everyone were to walk briskly 30 minutes a day, we could cut the incidence of many chronic diseases by 30 to 40 percent."

And for those of us who don't have half-hour chunks of time, the news gets even better. Several recent studies suggest that walking briskly three or four times a day for 10 minutes at a time may provide some of the same benefits as walking continuously for 30 minutes.

Because walking affects you in so many ways at once, it can be difficult to determine precisely why it's good for you. But much of the evidence so far is compelling.

Walking won't cure everything that ails you, of course, and nothing happens overnight. But you can do a world of good for yourself if you keep a steady course.

Walk, don't run. ■

Walking does not need too much preparation

Step Lively!

- Get into gear. Walkers' shoes need to have enough room at the front for the feet to spread.
- Ease on down that road. Avoid muscle aches by starting slowly and incorporating gentle stretches into both your warmup and cool-down.
- Plot your course. Some people walk at a specific time each day. Others shoehorn walking into their routines by parking the car a few blocks from the store or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Get an inexpensive Pedometer.
- Make it noteworthy. Record your efforts, including how long and how far you walked. Jotting down improvements keeps you motivated and challenges you to do better.
- Walk with a friend. Share your exercise sessions.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Losing fifteen pounds reduces your chances of getting diabetes. ■



By Gary Kodaseet

Director Attends Law Enforcement Meeting

The International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Bureau of Justice Assistance held a roundtable on Information Sharing in Indian Country on January 13-14, 2004, and invited the NICOA Executive Director to attend and represent the Indian elders. The meeting was convened at the Sheraton Old Town in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The purpose of the Roundtable was to encourage tribal law enforcement agencies to share information not only with one another but with other law enforcement organizations as well. Information sharing between the three tribes of the Hopi, Navajo and Zuni was highlighted as a working model during the meeting.

Representatives from the Department of Justice, FBI, BIA, Homeland Security, U.S. Attorney for New Mexico, and tribal Police from Acoma, Alaska, Cherokee, Hopi, Navajo, Northern plains, Yavapai-Prescott and Zuni attended the two day conference. Also attending was Bernie Teba, Cabinet Secretary Indian Affairs Committee for New Mexico. Secretary



Teba spoke on Governor Richardson's law enforcement initiative, especially his crackdown on drunk driving.

The majority of the time spent during the two day meeting was developing a survey instrument to be sent to Indian tribes to determine the extent of the tribes current efforts and to identify the infrastructure available for the tribes in the nation to share information with each other.

On the final day of the meeting, Mr. Kodaseet, Interim Executive Director was able to address the group on NICOA's concern about Elder Abuse and its rise in incidence on Indian reservations. A video on Elder Abuse called Roll Call was provided to the organization to help train law enforcement to identify abuse. The Chief of Police of Yavapai-Prescott, Mr. Ed Reina is reviewing the film to see if it can be useful to the organization. Mr. Kodaseet also shared excerpts from the soon to be published Report on Elder Abuse in Indian Country. ■

Avoid Being Bilked by Knowing the Enemy's Tactics

Seniors and Fraud

People who prey on senior's fear of financial insecurity have a variety of techniques, according to a list of scams developed by the National American Securities Administrators Association (NASAA) for its Senior Investor Resource Center (SIRC).

Many people have been deceived by purveyors of promissory notes, which promise a high rate of return in a short period of time. One operator, Virgil Womack, scammed over \$150 million from investors nationwide this way, only about \$90 million of which was recovered. The average victim was 68.

Another technique is to offer access to special banks that supposedly offer extraordinary returns and that normally do business only with the world's elite. About 300 people, most of them elderly, invested about \$50 million in one of these "prime bank" schemes.

Fraud can also be perpetrated through charitable gift annuities, if the charity is not legitimate; investment clubs that focus on members of a particular religious, ethnic or racial group; and the ever popular Ponzi-type schemes in which participants are expected to recruit other investors.

The SIRC also offers advice on how to rebuke suspicious characters. "Con artists will not hesitate to exploit your good manners," it warns. "Save your good manners for friends and family members, not strangers looking for a quick buck."

Perhaps most important: Do not hesitate to report fraud if you are taken. "Every day that you delay reporting fraud or abuse is one more day that the con artist is spending your money." ■

