





H E A L T H Y A T A N Y A G E

WHEN IT COMES TO BEING FIT, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE. WE ASKED EIGHT ATHLETES FROM DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS WHAT THEY DO TO STAY IN SHAPE. HERE'S WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY.

Staying fit isn't defined by age. Adhering to a lifestyle that includes exercising and keeping healthy greatly improves both your physical and mental wellness, whether you're in your 20s or your 80s. You don't need bulging muscles and perfect joints to stay active. Although growing older may spark fear of potential injuries, remaining sedentary is a more dangerous alternative. There are all sorts of ways to keep fit—whether it be swimming, running, yoga or strength training—and each can be easily tailored to your specific needs.

By Tess Raines / Photography By Erik Keller

NAME: MATT CEVALLOS

AGE: 28

WORK OUT: RUNNING

CITY: NAPLES

PROFESSION: HIGH SCHOOL RUNNING

COACH

WANT LIVING PROOF?

Meet eight local men and women—ranging in age from 28 to 81—who have committed to a sport or exercise and fell in love with it. You'll learn how they got started and why they stuck with it. Some have only been involved for a few years; others, for decades. But all share one thing in common: they have no intentions of quitting.

When soccer didn't pan out in high school ("all I could do was kick"), Matt Cevallos tried cross-country. "I wasn't really good at it. But I had the mentality that if I'm not good at something, I have to do better," he says. After school he'd run on the track and then in 2008, his junior year, he ran in the Naples Half Marathon. By senior year, soccer was far from his mind.

Fast forward 10 years. Cevallos is now the girls running coach at Palmetto Ridge High School, his own alma mater. For him, being able to pass on what he's learned about running throughout the years serves as one of his greatest motivations. "It is extremely fulfilling because there are a lot of things I wish I had known when I was in their situation," Cevallos explains. Cevallos works as a food runner at Season 52, a strength coach at Beyond Motion and as a substitute teacher for Collier schools in addition to coaching. Finding time to run means waking up at 3:30 a.m. most days. "It's a lot of mentally telling myself how bad I truly want it every day," he says.

His drive shows. "I like to run six days a week; I try to get 60 miles a week," he says. For variety, and a challenge, he'll rotate between one long run and two interval-type runs during the week. He likes to do 200-meter or 400-meter runs because the "different distances help with different capabilities." His fastest mile was 4 minutes and 56 seconds.

As for diet ... "What I've learned over the years is to moderate what I eat," he says. "The other key thing I look at is a steady protein intake."

Despite a recent Achilles tendon injury and having to run solo after his training partner left, Cevallos is not about to slow down. "There's just this feeling to it, when you go out for a run," he says. "There's no other day that compares. I love the idea of constantly being better the next day than I was the day before."





NAME: JULIE GRAHAM

AGE: 35

WORK OUT: BURN BOOTCAMP

CITY: ESTERO

PROFESSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AND
BRAND MANAGER

Burn Boot Camp Estero has one very dedicated member. So dedicated, in fact, that the camp's corporate parent tried to determine if Julie Graham was sponsored by anyone. She isn't. But her perpetual enthusiasm and constant smiles show that she truly loves her fitness program.

A friend suggested Graham try Burn Boot Camp in Naples in 2017, where she lived at the time. "It looked like a lot of fun and it looked challenging," she says. "When I went, I was like, 'Oh, this is what I need.'"

Rather than working out solo, Burn places an emphasis on building an encouraging and high-energy community. All the muscle groups are targeted throughout the week in the workouts that the trainers choose. Each workout is set up in stations, and the groups rotate to each within a 40-minute session.

Graham has been working out consistently since she was in college in 2002. She currently works out six days a week and can be found doing anything from handstands and power rolls, to squat jumps, dumbbell lunges, and high-intensity jump-roping—often in a single workout.

She loves combining circuit-style workouts and constant encouragement—both have kept her coming back for nearly three years. "It's impossible to get bored there," she says.

Graham complements her workouts with a strict diet of chicken and rice or broccoli that she manages through meal-planning and portions. On the weekends, however, she'll trade her usual protein-vegetable-starch platter for something she's been craving. "It's about balance," she says.

"What I love about fitness is always challenging yourself," she's quick to say. "I always want to be getting stronger in some way ... it's important to me to remain committed to my fitness journey so I can be an inspiration for other people."

NAME: JANEICE MARTIN

AGE: 47

WORK OUT: STRENGTH TRAINING

CITY: NAPLES

PROFESSION: COLLIER COUNTY JUDGE

After 13 years as a lawyer, Judge Janeice Martin decided to run for an open seat on the county court in 2008. She vowed that if she got the job, she'd commit to a healthier lifestyle. She won unopposed, in 2008 and 2014. Now she's living up to what she promised herself.

Growing up, Martin competed in water-skiing tournaments and played tennis, basketball, softball, volleyball, golf, lacrosse and soccer. That made it easy to be healthier post-election.

She completes at least a half hour of intensive strength training four to five times a week, supplementing it with cardio and the occasional session on the elliptical at her trainer's gym. "I'm healthier and I've had fewer injuries in my 40s than I did in my 30s," she says.

During her strength training sessions, Martin completes a full-body workout, targeting everything from the upper and lower back, biceps, quads and shoulders, using free-weights and bodyweights. "I also do a decent amount of push-ups," she says with a laugh.

Her exercise routine and mostly plant-based diet has reaped all sorts of benefits, including better energy, sharper mental focus, improved quality of sleep and even a better mood. "All of those things I feel strongly support an effort to be as effective in my job as I can be," she says.

In fact, much of the importance of her involvement in a healthy lifestyle is what she is able to bring back to the courtroom. For nearly a decade, Martin has presided over Collier County's treatment courts, which includes the drug court and mental health court. She and the Mental Health Court of Collier County have implemented a layer of wellness programming to the court's treatment regimens, working with groups such as Gulf Coast Runners and David Lawrence Center to provide nutrition classes, meditation classes, yoga, CrossFit, a small library and several other resources to those being treated. Those who have participated have shown remarkable improvement, she says.

"And that is actually what is in my mind a lot of times when I'm out there on the bike or whatever else: just thinking about people starting to feel better and live better," she says, "and that's really a great inspiration."





NAME: FLETCH FULLER

AGE: 53

WORK OUT: BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

CITY: NAPLES

PROFESSION: TRAINING SERGEANT FOR
COLLIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND
BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU INSTRUCTOR

Fletch Fuller first saw Brazilian jiu-jitsu watching the pay-per-view premier of the Ultimate Fighting Championship in 1993. "We ... were all spellbound," says Fuller. "It ended up being a blend of boxing, kickboxing, karate, taekwondo, judo and jiu-jitsu."

The limited rules of Brazilian jiu-jitsu appealed to Fuller, who then took a greater interest in the fact that smaller athletes could easily dominate and win a match.

Following his Army discharge in 1995, Fuller moved to Naples and learned traditional jiu-jitsu, focusing on throws and locks rather than the ground technique of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. He attended a seminar held by a grandmaster of mixed martial arts and drove to the other coast weekly to attend a half-hour class. He kept this up for a couple years, sharpening his skills and competing until Brazilian jiu-jitsu training became available in Naples. Finally, Fuller decided to open up his own school.

While he was teaching, a Brazilian instructor, Marcelo Pereira, came to Florida. They became fast friends. Over the years, Fuller shifted students over to Pereira, who opened Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Naples in 2010. "I got promoted to black belt in 2011 and I got my second-degree black belt close to a year ago, so I'm the highest-ranking black belt under Marcelo," he says.

"Brazilian jiu-jitsu in itself is a wonderful practice. It gives you confidence, it promotes flexibility, focus ... it's different than your garden-variety martial arts," Fuller adds. "It's a healthy lifestyle. It's an activity, it's a sport; it's something that keeps you in tune with your body."

NAME: JODI ZIAJKA

AGE: 61

WORK OUT: YOGA

CITY: NAPLES

PROFESSION: FITNESS

INSTRUCTOR & HOUSECLEANER

Jodi Ziajka can't pinpoint the exact date she started practicing yoga. But she knows that it's been a while. Her first foray into the discipline was purchasing VHS tapes about it. Laughing, she says, "That's how I started learning yoga!"

After receiving her 200-hour teacher training, she began teaching yoga classes at Crunch Fitness, and now is on staff at both Honor Yoga and Edison's Smart Fitness in Naples.

"I'm hoping to keep things lighthearted and comfortable," she says. "A lot of people are intimidated by yoga and I really want them not to be."

Along with the tranquility that yoga provides Ziajka ("it has calmed me down; has helped me grow up"), the physical benefits are one of her biggest motivators for teaching.

"Yoga will help increase flexibility; help the achiness in the joints. Now I'm aiming this toward my age group," she explains. "The flexibility is the most important."

Ziajka has always been fit, starting off as a competitive swimmer in her youth. But it was only more recently that she placed a greater emphasis on health and fitness. As a beachbody coach, Ziajka streams an online workout every morning, then teaches yoga throughout the day and often into the evening. She typically works out five days a week at a minimum, and takes turns targeting the upper body, lower body and abdominals.

As for her diet, she uses portion-control containers to eat the right amount of essentials—vegetables, fruits, proteins and carbs. "It's a matter of making better decisions," she says.

Ziajka's goals have everything to do with how she wants to feel. "Do you want to feel good or do you want to feel crappy? If you want to feel good, you've got to get up and move," she says. "Keep moving, keep active, keep thinking and keep smiling."





On any given day, you're likely to find Jerry Pershing poised on the courts of Fleischmann Park in Naples, armed with a paddle in one hand and a Wiffle ball in the other, teaching sports enthusiasts how to play pickleball. And if he's not showing someone the ropes, then he's likely practicing his own serves.

Pershing has plenty of experience with paddle sports. He played ping-pong with his father every night as a child in Milwaukee, and later switched to indoor paddleball, racquetball, handball and tennis. It wasn't until he landed in Naples in 1997—and was playing table tennis at the Norris Center near Cambier Park eight years ago—that he first considered adding pickleball to his repertoire. It's only fitting, since Naples has been dubbed the pickleball capital of the United States and is the home of the annual Minto U.S. Open Pickleball Championships.

"It's easy to learn; it's difficult to become very good at," Pershing says. "There is a lot of skill and finesse."

Pershing explains that pickleball is a strategic game that requires you to be constantly on alert, watching the ball and staying in sync with your partner in order to beat your opponents. "The ball doesn't bounce ... so you always have to be moving to the ball, because the ball doesn't come to you except on the serve," says Pershing. He's not trying to make the sport sound scary; if anything, he hopes to recruit more people. At Pickleball Naples, Pershing and his coaching partner, Tami Thomas, instruct beginners on basic terminology, footwork and serves during each lesson.

Although pickleball is his primary sport, Pershing still makes time for yoga, swimming and biking, and he follows a careful diet. "Lots of skinless chicken breast, lots of vegetables, fruit ... I only have one bad habit—I love Cheetos," he says with a sly grin.



NAME: JERRY PERSHING

AGE: 72

WORK OUT: PICKLEBALL

CITY: NAPLES

PROFESSION: PICKLEBALL COACH
& RETIRED ENTREPRENEUR

Betty Lou Tucker and Karl Wiedamann befriended each other when they started bicycling together in their residential community. Tucker had recently lost her husband and Wiedamann was going through a divorce. It was a pivotal time for them both.

“We were athletic friends for a good while and (then) we became more than athletic friends,” says Wiedamann, while Tucker flashes a smile.

Now married, Wiedamann and Tucker share several common interests, but they are still grounded in their respective athletic endeavors. For Wiedamann, that’s competitive swimming; for Tucker, it’s running.

“I was in my 40s and I just sort of felt myself getting not as fit as I wanted to be and decided that maybe (running) would be a good way to do it,” says Tucker.

After moving to Florida with her late first husband in 1994, Tucker immediately connected with Gulf Coast Runners and began participating

NAME: KARL WIEDAMANN &

BETTY LOU TUCKER

BOTH AGE: 81

WORK OUT: SWIMMING/RUNNING

CITY: NAPLES

PROFESSION: RETIRED SENIOR

ENGINEER/I.T. MANAGER AND

RETIRED BUSINESS OWNER

in several races and sprint triathlons. “The year I was 60 ... I set a record in the Senior Grandmasters in the Naples Half Marathon,” she says.

While she’s since struggled with bouts of arthritis, limiting her ability to swim and cycle the way she used to, Tucker still heads to the beach three to four times a week and will run about five miles a day. She’s a loyal participant in local races, like the one Gulf Coast Runners hosts in downtown Naples every Thanksgiving.

Wiedamann credits his mother, who swam in college, for igniting his interest in swimming. She secured two weeks of swim lessons for Wiedamann when he was in high school and he loved it so much that he joined the swim team at University of Florida. He continued swimming until he graduated with a degree in engineering.

“I went to work,” he says. “That was in 1960 when I stopped. I did not get back in the pool until 1995.”

Getting reacquainted with swimming wasn’t too difficult. Three years later, he and 19 other Masters swimmers—a class of competitive swimming for different age groups—were invited to participate in a one-week session at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado.

In 2008, Wiedamann set a world record for his age group in the men’s 50-, 100- and 200-meter breaststroke at the FINA World Masters Championships. This year, at the YMCA Masters National Meet in Orlando, he won two gold medals for his age in the 100- and 200-yard breaststroke races, and a silver for the 50-yard race.

He trains three days a week in the pool and three days in the gym. It’s clear that Tucker and Wiedamann don’t plan to slow down anytime soon: Wiedamann’s bucket-list items include breaking records in the 105-to-109 age group. ■



