

APFRI: Education is key

Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs Office

APFRI: Education is key



Melanie Richardson (left), Army Physical Fitness Research Institute Health Fitness Instructor, shows Staci Hirschman how to properly operate exercise equipment in the Thorpe Hall Gym during a recent strength training class. The class is one of many educational opportunities offered by APFRI. Photo by Spc. Jennifer Rick.

Oct. 30, 2008 -- He arrived at Carlisle blissfully unaware of the health indicators for future diabetes, despite both parents having diabetes. Since taking part in the Army Physical Fitness Research Institute program, he has lost 50 pounds, 7 inches of waistline, decreased his cholesterol by 57 points, and his glucose is in the green.

The former USAWC student and current faculty member credits the APFRI program for his better overall health.

"The education that APFRI gave me on the importance of diet and exercise followed by the APFRI assessment changed my life," said Air Force Lt. Col. Gerald Goodfellow, an instructor in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations. "Before participating in the APFRI programs I knew my diet was bad, and my exercise habits were basically non-existent. The education reinforced this self evaluation, and the APFRI assessment really validated the negative effects of my poor diet and exercise habits. I decided at that point that it was time for me to get serious and implement the proper eating and exercise techniques APFRI had taught me."

The program may have not just made him healthier, but also may have extended his life according to Goodfellow.

"Prior to making these changes I filled out a questionnaire on the realage.com website to determine my physical age," he said. "It calculated my physical age at 43, it now calculates my physical age at 33. I think this means instituting APFRI's education and training in my life will probably add 10 years to my life."

The APFRI program has been exported because it's an essential element of leader education. After years of success at the Army War College, it's now been created at the U.S. Sgt. Maj. Academy at Ft. Bliss, Texas, and the Command and Generals Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Ks.

"We have exported the entire program, with only modifications for the age groups of the communities being assessed," said Col. Tom Williams, APFRI director.

Education

Changing behavior through education is the goal of the Army Physical Fitness Research Institute.

As part of the War College experience, each resident and up to 50 percent of distance education students undergoes a complete health assessment. The assessments help to give the APFRI staff a baseline for each student health, fitness, nutrition and well-being. From that information the staff is able to identify each individual's strengths and identify fitness and nutrition and behavioral changes that may be necessary. Then the APFRI staff provides information and guidance through classes and other educational opportunities.

"Almost everyone realizes that exercise and living a healthy lifestyle are important, but we seldom give ourselves time to do so," Williams said. "We try and help that by giving you the knowledge of what your risk factors are and by providing opportunities to learn how to reduce them."

The education aspect is one of the most important, according to Williams. "The underpinning of the program is to push you into lowering your risk factors," he said. "The best way to do that is to educate you on what they are and what you can do to mitigate them. Another benefit of the program is that it helps to motivate by giving individuals an idea of their health relative to that of others in their age group."

Strength Training Classes

Muscular strength is a fundamental physical trait necessary for health, functional ability, enhanced quality of life and increased performance at work and athletic events. It is also an essential component of any comprehensive exercise program.

"This program discusses how to use the equipment in Thorpe Hall correctly and then you get hands

on instruction by our Executive Fitness Team to make sure you are doing things the most effective way," he said. "This helps because too often injuries will undermine someone's ability to exercise.

"A little education gives them the know-how to use it for the best results."

Nutrition Education Classes

APFRI offers assistance in the realm of nutrition as well. Education is offered on proper portion sizes, tips to reduce high LDL cholesterol levels and tips for weight loss.

Stress Management Classes

Another important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle is managing stress. Stress has been linked to actual physical changes in the body, which over time can lead to cardiovascular disease. To help manage stress APFRI offers stress management classes and individual programs if necessary.

Success based on this knowledge helps keep up the confidence to continue as well he said.

"When you see positive results you are far more likely to maintain the lifestyle."

Participants in the class also receive email reminders to help make sure they remember when classes are being held. "Each of the classes and educational opportunities are open to everyone in the Carlisle Barracks community," said Williams.

"The times the classes are held and the reminders they send out really make it easy," said Ginny Wilson, family member, who attended a recent flexibility class. "Since I've been a part of the class I've really noticed a change. My body just feels better."

These kinds of changes are what the program hopes to achieve according to Williams.

"When you make these health changes it truly can change your life," he said. "Education is key."