

Health & Family

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FITNESS PROFILE

Years after surviving stroke, Fort Lauderdale woman strives to be picture of health.

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Fitness Profile

ON HER OWN NOW: Betty Young, 60, says fitness has always been a way of life for her. She just became a certified personal trainer. *Staff photo/Lou Roman*

A stroke of luck

Betty Young was healthy, fit and in her 40s when a stroke paralyzed half her body.

Anxious to walk again — and frustrated that her physical therapists were not being aggressive enough — she hired a personal trainer, who in two months helped her not only to walk again, but also to regain the physical shape she was in before the stroke.

Since then, Young has battled against her genetic

blueprint with healthy nutrition and by staying in optimal physical shape. She is an inspiration to her friends who constantly ask her to help them update their fitness routines. Which led her — at the age of 60 — to become a certified personal trainer.

Were you always into fitness?

Yes, it has been a way of life for me. In college I was involved in the physical fitness program at the University of Oklahoma and took a lot of courses, just because I was interested in it. I also have a degree in home economics, so I have an extensive background in nutrition. After I graduated from college, I kept up my fitness routine, and did mainly aerobics because at the time, weight training had not become popular yet. I was in excellent condition until I had

Woman says her top physical condition helped her overcome a stroke 20 years ago.

the stroke in 1990 and was paralyzed on my right side.

Was your physical condition a factor in your recovery?

Absolutely, and not just physically, but mentally as well. I had the stroke on a Thursday and they told me I was not going to have a physical therapist to work with me until Monday. During that time, while I was lying on the hospital bed, I started trying to move. Having done exercises all my life, I know how to isolate muscle groups and channel energy into specific parts of my body. Don't ask me why, but I chose my big toe, and I kept looking at it, focusing and channeling every ounce of energy in my body. I knew if I could make it move, I could make the rest of my body move. I remember when I finally did it, and told my husband, he didn't believe me. So I made him sit and stare at my toe for an hour and a half until I got it to move again.

Did physical therapy help at all?

When I finally started physical therapy, I didn't feel I was making improvements fast enough, you know. The therapists weren't being really aggressive with me, and I was getting frustrated because I wanted to walk again soon. So the doctors suggested I hire a personal trainer. At the time, we commuted between Fort Lauderdale and Dallas. So I decided

to hire a trainer in Dallas, and found one who was studying physical training and was in his last semester. With him, I started doing free weights to try and rebuild my muscle strength.

How soon did you recover?

It took a couple of months to get back to normal. Of course, my right side will never be as strong as my left side. There's still a weakness, but the only people who can detect it are my trainer and I. During my workouts, my right side gives out on me. When the muscles are tired, they just shut off.

What is your current fitness routine?

I had a trainer until recently, but now I workout on my own either at the gym or at home, where I have a room equipped with a bench and some weights. At the gym, I take body-sculpting classes four times a week. Also, for the past year and a half, I started practicing yoga once a week.

How about your nutrition habits?

I eat everything, but I eat it in moderation. I adjust my food intake according to what I'm going to do that day. The more food you eat, the more exercise you have to do in order to maintain your weight. Calories are energy, so you just have to balance the energy in vs. the energy out. Usually, I eat eggs in the morning and

chicken and salads for lunch. We eat a lot of fish, maybe two or three times a week. I have protein shakes for snacks. I don't eat fried foods and don't eat a lot of starches such as white bread. I'm also not much into sweets or deserts, I can have one or two bites of it, but I can live without them.

How did you get into personal training?

It was just recently that I became certified. I did it for my own benefit, since I do so much of it. And also because I always have friends asking me to help them with their routines, and I wasn't comfortable doing it without being certified.

What is your ultimate fitness goal?

The stroke had nothing to do with my fitness condition; I inherited the genes from my father's side of the family, so there's nothing I can do to prevent another one. My ultimate goal is to keep myself in top physical condition, so that, if by some chance I ever should have another stroke, I have enough strength to come back again.

— MAGALY MORALES

Know someone who is a profile in fitness? E-mail kvarma@sun-sentinel.com. Or call 954-356-4719 and leave a recorded message. Include the name, city and daytime phone number, plus a brief description of how this person stays fit.