Traditional Alaska Native Tips for a Healthy Lifestyle

*By Leona Christensen Long*

Every January, it seems a healthier lifestyle is at the top of the list of everyone’s New Year’s resolutions. It is more than just diet and exercise; well-being also includes having a strong support network. Students from the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Interior-Aleutians Campus’s (I-AC) Rural Nutrition Services (RNS) class offer tips on how rural Alaskans can fit healthy lifestyle choices into the traditional Alaska Native way of life.

Whether you get your exercise from chopping and hauling wood or playing basketball at your school gym, staying active is a key to health. Outdoor activities like snowshoeing are great exercise.
snowshoeing, sledding and dog mushing are great for exercise. Another fun way to exercise is to practice and perform traditional Native dances. While beadwork may not seem like exercise, beadwork helps improve focus and fine motor skills as well as social support when done with family and friends.

Interested in putting a healthy spin on your traditional Alaska Native meals? Your fish and moose meat recipes will taste just as delicious baked instead of fried and will be lower in calories. You can add more green to your diet with wild Alaskan plants. Tender fireweed, goose tongue and dandelion leaves can be added to salads, and wild chives can be used as a garnish or seasoning. The spruce needles and rosehips that you gather can be made into healing teas that also contain natural Vitamin C.

Positive relationships help keep you healthy. Having a strong network of support can make the challenges of life seem easier. Take time to visit your elders and other friends in the village. I-AC students say that having the courage to step out of the circle and help others is another way to build stronger relationships.

RNS is a culturally relevant multidisciplinary course of study that combines nutrition science, Alaska Native knowledge, behavioral health and outreach skills. Courses are taught by teaching teams that include licensed professionals, Alaska Native service providers, Alaska Native elders and guest speakers in a blended delivery style allowing students to learn and earn university credits while staying in their home community. Students may use credits toward an RNS Occupational Endorsement, area of concentration in Tribal Management, additional Certificate and Degree programs or as professional development. Students may also apply their RNS coursework toward earning a bachelor’s of science degree in dietetics at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Since 1989, Interior-Aleutians Campus (I-AC) has integrated lifelong educational opportunities with rural Alaskan and Alaska Native communities, cultures and ways of life. Our faculty and staff are committed to empowering our students with the tools they need to be successful whether their goal is
a certificate for a trade, continuing education units, an associate's, bachelor's or master's degree. For more information, call 888-474-5207 or visit us at www.uaf.edu/iac or on Facebook. You can also contact Shawn Dickson, coordinator for I-AC’s Aleutian-Pribilof Center at sldickson@alaska.edu or 907-581-1666.