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Male Fit Over 40 Winner

Emile Tujague

July 2014 • Complimentary



Fit Over 40 Winner

Emile Tujague

Louisiana's Health & Fitness Magazine's first male Fit Over 40 contest is over. We received many inspiring stories from local men about how they stay healthy and active in their 40s and beyond. It may be a cliché to say that they're all winners, but in this case, it's true. However, only one person could receive the most votes, and that was 43-year-old Emile Tujague. Tujague overcame significant physical adversity in his childhood to turn fitness into an integral part of his life as a teenager and as an adult. He went from being unable to participate in P.E. as a child to owning and operating his own personal training studio. His journey is truly a remarkable one. Congratulations, Emile!

A Challenging Childhood

For most people, childhood is a time of play and activity. It's a time to make lifelong friends playing baseball and touch football. But it wasn't this way for Tujague. He suffered from Osgood-Schlatter disease, a condition caused by stress in the muscles and tendons that support the knees. It tends to happen during growth spurts, so it's primarily seen in young men and women. While some people with Osgood-Schlatter are able to get by with minimal symptoms and discomfort, Tujague suffered from a severe case. If he participated in any activity that involved running or jumping, it would take several days to recover from. Many sufferers experience symptoms only for a few months; Tujague battled the disorder from adolescence until his college years.

As a result, during P.E. and recess, all Tujague could do was sit on the sidelines and watch the other children play. Occasionally, he would try to participate, but since he rarely had a chance to practice or hone his skills, he was terrible. "Kids can be cruel and the teasing was certainly scarring," Tujague said. "As I grew older, I found myself having an aversion to organized sporting or recreational events."

Escape to Weights

In 8th grade, Tujague's school announced a physical fitness challenge that would include pushups, chin-ups, and sit-ups competitions. He decided he was going to change his classmates' perceptions about him. Because these exercises did not strain his knees, he relentlessly practiced pushups and sit-ups at home and doing chin-ups on the monkey bars on the school playground. "When the day finally arrived for the fitness challenge, I absolutely swept the contest!" Tujague said. "This was my first experience with how training and commitment can make a true, measurable impact."

After this success, Tujague's father purchased a weight set and a weightlifting booklet for him to use at home. He used it frequently, which prompted Tujague's father to convince a local gym to allow him to join despite being underage. "Since then, I've never been without some form of gym membership," Tujague said.

As his love of weight training blossomed, Tujague received a doctor's note to excuse him from P.E. class. His school allowed him to spend that time in the weight room. He continued to research exercise and weightlifting techniques. The results were more than just physical. "I could carry myself with a bit more confidence," Tujague said. "I was never...a big muscular guy, but there was no one... 'kicking sand in my face' anymore."

A Fit Life

In college, Tujague earned a degree in exercise physiology to further his study of fitness and help others achieve their exercise goals. For almost 18 years, he was co-owner of One to One Personal Training and Clinical Exercise Facility. This summer, he opened his own specialty exercise studio called SMX (slow motion exercise), which offers only personal training.

Tujague's personal workout regimen involves 2-3 weight training sessions per week using what's referred to as "high intensity" training protocols. Instead of throwing or dropping the weight, effort is made to slowly, deliberately lift and lower the weight. It takes as long as 10 seconds to lift the weight and another 5-10 seconds to lower it. "I am not relying on physics (momentum and gravity) to simply move the weight for me," Tujague said. "A true high intensity workout will last no longer than 30 minutes and is often much shorter than that."



Fitness After 40

While many people are hampered by physical issues in their 40s that limit their workouts, Tujague said that hasn't been the case for him. His increasingly busy schedule has proven to be the biggest impediment to exercise. "With the demands of running a business and young children waiting for me at home, by the time I'm done training my clients, I must admit it's easy to shoot out of my studio and get home, even if it is my own workout day," Tujague said.

He said he does have some aches and pains, but being in the fitness business for so long makes it easy for him to select alternative exercises that won't exacerbate any current problems. "A high percentage of my clientele are significantly older than I am; therefore, I find myself strategically working around their limitations on a daily basis," Tujague said.

Knowledge is the key to staying active and fit over 40. "Working through it" is not a good idea if you have aches and pains that last for weeks without improvement. "We must learn to discern between a nuisance flare-up vs. a pending issue," Tujague said. "If you do have an issue that prevents certain exercises from being performed, or certain muscles from being worked, there are usually ways to work around it, so don't just throw your hands in the air and quit. An 80% workout is certainly better than no workout at all."

Get Help!

By the time he'd turned 40, Tujague had decades of experience and research to teach him the most efficient ways to work out while avoiding pain and injury. But many people decide to exercise after 40 and just don't know how. It's important to swallow your pride and seek the help of a professional. "If I wanted to learn how to play guitar, I could sit around strumming on it for years before acquiring any real success with it, or I could simply hire a guitar teacher to put me on the right track and eliminate years of trial and error," Tujague said. "If you want to really make a physical change in how your body looks, your health, and how you feel, you need to do things right and not simply spin your wheels hoping for a change and risking injury."

Up Close & Personal

Words to live by?

"Make the choice to succeed, and then act as if you have no other choice."

Favorite pastime?

"If I'm not working, I want to be fishing. I love navigating the marshes of Louisiana and enjoying the natural resources that we are so lucky to have."

Favorite family activity in New Orleans?

"I have 6-year-old boy/girl twins; my family and I really enjoy the many opportunities offered to us by the Audubon Institute. Between the zoo and the aquarium, we have the opportunity to make many family memories and quite a photo collection."

Favorite place to go in New Orleans on a weekend?

"My wife and I absolutely love going on French Quarter "staycations." With so many wonderful hotels and restaurants downtown, I hardly miss traveling. The ability to drive 20 minutes and feel like you are on a vacation is hard to beat. I'd have to say that the Windsor Court is very high on our list, and we'll soon be staying at the Roosevelt for the first time."

Workout mantra?

"Don't work out longer... work out smarter."