

Optimal Aging & Keys to Longevity

I am a Geriatrician & Gerontologist and have been studying Aging over the past 2 decades. I have also talked to countless patients and have learned much from them. Men by and large, live about 7 years less than women, and average life expectancy for men is about 72 years. During my career, I have come across several centenarians and it is always interesting to hear what advice they can leave behind. Optimal Aging is a concept that deems that we can maintain our youth through knowledge and active participation in our own health by prevention. The keys to longevity can be summarized in just a few paragraphs:

- Food is not only moderation, but also in *small amounts!* Mice that were given much smaller amounts of food often outlive mice that are given whatever they want to eat. In the United States, food is abundant, and if humans want to reach their potential limits of lifespan, a certain degree of starvation is required, especially in today's world!
- The *right kinds* of food are essential for a lifespan that is free from chronic diseases. In our country, we consume too much salt and sugar, and these could account for the absurd levels of high blood pressure and diabetes that we have. We eat too much preserved foods, and don't consume enough fresh foods like fruits and vegetables. The latter contain large amounts of antioxidants. One theory why we age is because free radicals attack our cells, and we need antioxidants to ward off these bad elements. Examples of antioxidants are Vitamin E and C. If at all possible, eating fresh foods is better than taking supplements, as it is never quite the same. Certain foods seem to be associated with longevity. A fish diet, olives, green tea, almonds, red wine seems beneficial. Obviously, everything in moderation. All these substances contain potent antioxidants.
- Exercise, *exercise*, exercise. This seems like an old song, but it is the same song. What many people don't realize is that certain hormones decline with aging and exercise can restore growth hormones, testosterone in some individuals. The oldest man in the world was once asked what his secret to longevity was; and he said that he never rode in a car when it was first introduced as it made him carsick. As a result, he would walk to wherever he needed to go, and covered 10-20 miles each day! Besides aerobic exercise, it is important to also do weight training as it can reverse muscle loss and osteoporosis that occur with aging.
- People that are *happy* too seem to live long. There may be a biological explanation as when one is happy, certain chemicals and hormones are produced. Research has also demonstrated that being single can shorten your life span. Having children paradoxically can extend your life. It is also very important to keep your mind active, and utilize your memory and cognitive skills: "Use it or lose it" is the adage.
- *Smoking* is one thing that can certainly shorten your life span. It is still unfortunately one of the leading causes of heart disease and cancers. Research has shown that the damage to the body is not only to yourself, but the risk for heart disease and cancers may be transmitted in your genes to your future generations. As such, smoking is one of the strongest modifiable risk factor.
- Having good parents certainly help: your *genes* also determine how long you are going to last. We weren't built to last forever, but with proper care, we can reach our limits or potential. You have to start working on this the moment you are born.

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