

# ***Live Long and Prosper: How to Live a Long and Healthy Life***

By RYAN Harrison

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We all want to lead long, healthy, and productive lives. Well, the secret is out: such a life is no accident! It may certainly begin with favorable genetics, but there is much that the average person can do to encourage optimum health of the body, mind and spirit.

## Take Care of Your Body

You've only got one body, and you have to live with it your whole life, so it behooves you to be concerned with keeping it in top condition. Truly, what good is a long life if you live it in poor health? The following tips can help get your body running optimally.

**Eat well.** Your body is made out of the foods you eat...literally. Depending on your activity level, 6-8 months from now nearly one hundred per cent of the cells that make up your body will have regenerated. It's important to remember that these new cells will literally be created from what you eat between now and then. If you want a stronger, leaner, healthier body, you need to eat foods that will create this reality. It's really that simple. What that means is that you need to lay off the candies, sodas and alcoholic drinks and start eating those things that you probably already know are good for you.

For a great idea of what to eat and how often to eat it, check out the Healing Foods Pyramid, put out by University of Michigan Integrative Medicine department (<http://www.med.umich.edu/umim/clinical/pyramid/index.htm>). It recommends a daily diet consisting of: 8-12 glasses of water, 4-11 servings of whole grains, 1-3 servings of legumes, 3-9 servings of healthy fats (such as nuts, seeds, and some vegetable oils), and 1-4 servings of lean meats and fish on a weekly basis. What's more, the Healing Foods Pyramid suggests eating mindfully: truly savoring each bite of food so that you enjoy and focus on what you are eating.

**Exercise often.** The human body was created to move. Research continually suggests that even modest amounts of exercise can substantially reduce a person's chance of dying of heart disease, cancer and other disease-related causes. What's more, people who exercise experience increased self-confidence, more fulfilling social lives, and the general slowing down of the aging process.

You don't have to spend hours every day at a gym or on a treadmill to reap the benefits of exercise. In fact, the exercise that will most quickly move you from out-of-shape to top fitness is simply *walking*. How convenient that it's also free, easy to do, and enjoyable! Walking briskly for 30-60 minutes a day is all it takes. ("Briskly" means that the walk should be at a fast but not uncomfortable pace; if you can hold a conversation without being out of breath, you need to kick it up a notch.) Among other benefits, brisk walking reduces cholesterol, improves cardiovascular fitness and blood circulation, reduces risk of heart attack and reduces high blood pressure.

**Consider dietary supplements a kind of “health insurance.”** Most of the food you eat –if not of the home-grown or organic variety – is probably lower in nutrients than it should be. Standard farming practices deplete soil of vital nutrients, resulting in produce that is of less nutritional value than food grown an hundred years ago. Is it possible to get all the essential nutrients you require from food? Perhaps. But only if you eat a wide array of organic fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes on a daily basis. Not to point fingers, but chances are that you don’t. Vitamin and mineral supplementation can help make up the difference.

Natural health proponents will tell you that this is a “pay now or pay later” situation. Either you purchase and regularly take nutritional supplements *now*, increasing your health and wellbeing and preventing potential illnesses, or you pay *later* by getting sick and very possibly developing diseases that end up draining your finances through horrific medical bills. Proper supplementation can help offset the health risks involved with a number of daily concerns including poor digestion, nutrient-robbing foods and beverages, pollution, and the destruction of nutrients that results from processed and overcooked foods. To find out which health-preserving nutritional supplements will best benefit you, consult a trained nutritional consultant.

### Mind Your Mind

Good health isn’t necessarily just a physical concern. A strong and active mind certainly plays its part. After all, can a physically-fit person really claim to be radiantly healthy if she is chronically depressed, anxious or stressed? Here are a few suggestions for treating your mind right and helping it lead you to a long and healthy life.

**Make time to relax.** Not only does stress sap your energy, negatively affect your immune system and lead to chronic physical problems, it also steals your attention, exhausts your inner reserves, and keeps you involved in negative thought patterns.

Stress may be hard to dodge in this fast-moving world, but you can take steps to relax and recover each day. One important rule is to allow yourself at least 10 minutes between stressful tasks, whether at home, work or even in your spare time. This gives your mind an opportunity to unwind before you launch into another potentially stressful endeavor. During these 10 minutes, try gentle or deep breathing techniques, muscle relaxation exercises, visualization, stretching or any combination of the above. The more often you take time to relax, the better you will get at it and the better it will work for you.

**Laugh out loud.** Read funny books, watch movies or television shows that make you laugh, share funny stories or jokes with good friends, or even “fake it until you make it” by forcing yourself to laugh until it “takes.” Laughing is a powerful stress-buster that helps a mind relax. Research has shown that it has

amazing health benefits. It gives the immune system a boost and reduces the levels of stress hormones that lead to premature aging. Deep laughter – straight from the belly – can have a truly

*“Laughter Therapy” is a new and exciting tool you can use to tap into the power of laughter. Typically practiced in a group setting, it helps reduce inhibitions, increases self-confidence, and even develops leadership qualities among participants. Visit [www.LaughterTherapy.com](http://www.LaughterTherapy.com) for more information on this innovative and fun experience.*

cathartic effect, releasing pent up emotions and frustrations. It can also serve to distract you from focusing on feelings of anger, guilt or stress. Studies have also shown that laughter improves creativity, thinking ability, problem-solving, memory, recall and learning.

**Challenge yourself.** While physical exercise is certainly good for the brain as it maintains blood flow and helps prevent the death of brain cells, mental exercise is just as important. It takes some effort to build a strong mind, but the results are certainly worth the exertion!

Research is continually uncovering the relationship between an active mind and reduced risk of several debilitating conditions including Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease and dementia. A lifetime of mental activity is the best protection against mental decline in old age. However, it's never too late to put your mind to use! Simple and fun things like crossword puzzles and number games such as the recently popular "Sudoku" help keep a mind sharp. For more adventurous people, studying a foreign language and learning a musical instrument have proven effective at keeping the mind in top condition.

### Stretch Your Spirit

Holistic health involves not only the body and mind, but the spirit as well. Humans are more than their physical bodies, thoughts, and feelings. They are also spiritual beings. Refining your spiritual energies can help round out your life, improving your health and relationships, as well as your outlook. Here are some ideas for encouraging your own spiritual growth and health.

**Discover your inner landscape.** Do you know who you really are? It's common to set up mental list of what you like, what you don't, what your strengths and weaknesses are, and how you think life is meant to unfold for you. What if there is more to you than you give yourself credit?

Spiritual teachers have always encouraged plumbing the depths of our inner selves. Engaging regularly in practices such as meditation, journaling, and visual and kinesthetic arts can unlock parts of yourself that you didn't even know existed. The truer your understanding of yourself, the more freely you can live your life.

**Encourage connection.** It's very easy to live a solitary life. In an age of unprecedented global communications, it's ironic that people are feeling increasingly lonely. This trend toward isolationism is an unfortunate cultural development. Yet the truth is, in the words of metaphysical poet John Donne, "No man is an island." Mystics and scientists alike have confirmed that we are intrinsically connected to everyone around us in a variety of ways, from the energetic and subatomic, to larger relations involving cultures and societies.

Honoring and valuing the connection you have to those around you can help create happiness in your own life and in the lives of others. When you share time, thoughts, hopes, dreams, heartbreaks and joys with the people you care about, you open yourself up to a rich world of relationships. Whether sharing deeply and intimately with a partner or spouse, or building community with others of like mind and values, you gain an opportunity to experience the fullness and vibrant energy of love that comes from being part of something larger than yourself.

**Serve others.** Giving your time and energy to causes that you believe in can deepen your sense of self-worth, broaden your faith in and understanding of humanity, and energize your own spiritual growth. It's important to serve for the right reasons, however. Serving others because you think you should or because you feel obligated to will only drain and exhaust you. Authentic service, on the other hand, is a natural human tendency. We are hardwired to spontaneously feel drawn to do service that engages our hearts and minds. This kind of service, a natural outpouring of the human heart manifest in the work of our hands, actually nourishes the one who is giving as much as those receiving.