

The Secrets of Longevity: An Holistic Approach to an Epic Quest

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Despite the fact that the subject of longevity is quite in vogue, the race to discover a “fountain of youth” that can extend life and combat the natural slide of aging is a theme that has run the course of human history. In every generation, people have wanted to live longer, happier, more fulfilled lives. Today, having rounded the corner of the 21st century, we may not have *all* the answers to this question, but we certainly have some.

Most information on the subject deals with the physical aspects of life. From nanotechnology and genomics to nutrition and exercise, there is a wide spectrum of factors to consider that can (and certainly will) affect your body. But what about “the rest” of what makes you, you? Holistic health practitioners maintain that just as important as healthful interventions that strengthen the body and fight aging, the mind and spirit must also be considered. Taking this triangular tactic, here is a wider, more holistic approach to longevity:

Body

Your body is biologically unique; no two people are exactly the same. This degree of bio-individuality means that there are differences in what “works” nutritionally and therapeutically for each person. All the same, there are some broad approaches to health that can have dramatic, positive effects on longevity.

Protect your heart. Heart disease is a growing threat in most industrialized societies. Where traditional medicine suggests prescription medications to thin the blood and reduce overall cholesterol, natural means exist which not only strengthen the heart and integrity of the blood vessel walls, but clean the vessels, as well. Eating minimally-processed and whole foods, drinking plenty of water, and exercising regularly all help keep your heart as healthy as it can be.

Feed your brain. Mounting research suggests that what you feed your brain is vital to its overall health. Dementia (including Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases) and mood disorders (such as anxiety and depression) can be directly traced to inflammation in the brain caused, at least in part, by a diet high in the wrong kinds of dietary fats. While it’s true that some activities, such as solving crossword puzzles and learning a language, are helpful to “stay sharp upstairs,” a growing body of evidence suggests that diet may play an even more important role.

Chief on the lists of necessary nutrients for the brain are omega-3 fatty acids, especially DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). DHA is the structural fat in the brain and nervous system. In fact, 20% of our brain, by dry weight, is composed of DHA. Unfortunately, the average diet is pitifully low in omega-3s, typically found in fresh water fish and algae, because our eating habits have shifted so drastically. Putting your diet in reverse by adding more omega-3 sources or supplements is a must for brain health.

Get off your butt. There are a hundred reasons why exercise has been preached for decades by alternative and preventive health advocates. Daily exercise – which can be as simple as walking briskly for 30-45 minutes – can literally tip the scales of your health. Making and taking the time to sweat is an investment you cannot afford to pass up.

Consistent exercise – [sorry, once a month isn't enough!] – will improve your mood, combat high cholesterol and blood pressure, bring down your weight, strengthen the heart and lungs, promote better sleep at night, improve your sex life and can even be fun! Whatever you choose as your exercise-of-the-month, if you're new to it, be easy on yourself. Studies show that you'll lower your risk of injury and will stick with it longer if you start out slowly and increase your workouts.

Take less in; get more out. Bigger portions and more high-calorie, processed foods may actually shorten your life. Studies show that caloric restriction – consuming even just 25% fewer calories in a day – has proven effective at slowing aging, reducing risk for heart disease and diabetes, and prolonging life. Tip: try eating half as much at one or two meals of the day.

Just as important as what goes *into* your body is what should be *leaving* it. It's indisputable that each one of us is carrying a veritable cocktail of toxic chemicals in our bodies. They are hiding in our fat cells and organs and are secretly undoing all the good that we're trying to do with our healthy diets and exercise routines. Make a conscious choice to complete a full-body detoxification program at least once a year, twice if possible. This should include a good colon cleansing system, a broad-spectrum multivitamin and mineral supplement, probiotics to support intestinal health, and lots of pure, filtered water.

Mind

"A mind is a terrible thing to waste," especially if you're interested in longevity. Not only does your mental wellbeing color how you view the world and your experience of it, it also directly affects your body's aging process.

Laugh often. Everyone loves a good, deep, belly laugh because, well...it's fun! It's also very good for you. Laughing regularly can help lower blood pressure, increase vascular flow and give a boost to the immune system. It also releases endorphins in the brain, which are our bodies' natural pain killers, and naturally improves mood and outlook. Children laugh about 400 times in a day; adults, only 25. Bring out your inner child and enjoy a good laugh...all day.

Clean out your closet. No one is perfect. Everyone has issues – hidden or otherwise. They are part of being human. Some people have been deeply traumatized, stigmatized or ostracized. As a species, we have an incredible capacity to experience mental and emotional pain. And while a degree of pain is inevitable, the resulting suffering can be minimized.

A natural, though unfortunate, response to emotional pain is to repress our feelings. Unfortunately, this often leads to damaging addictions or interpersonal difficulties which compound the issues, putting extra stress on our bodies, and dulling our hearts. Varying schools of psychotherapy allow people to come to wholeness and release pain in their own time through

talking, creating art, or allowing spontaneous movement in their bodies. A more rapid (and arguably more effective) approach is energy psychology à la Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT). Blending ancient Chinese medicine theory of subtle energies with gentle tapping on specific points of the body, EFT has been shown to obliterate addictions, reduce stress and anxiety, diffuse anger, and heal eating disorders, among many other uses. Qualified EFT practitioners can be found around the globe.

Spirit

There's no substitute for a healthy spirit. Whether you subscribe to a particular religious view or connect with spirituality in your own way, taking the time to develop your spiritual awareness and depth can improve the quality of your life, and by extension, the choices you make that affect its duration.

Go within. Praying, meditating, journaling or sitting in reflective silence can reveal subtle thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that support and direct your life. As you connect with these energies and embody them, your sense of spirituality depends and matures.

Gaining spiritual health results in a positive outlook, hope, an acceptance of life and death, forgiveness, higher self-esteem and inner peace. Without these dimensions, what use is a long life? Spend some time each day going inward and, whatever you find there, offer it compassion and loving-kindness.

Practice what you preach. Embracing your own sense of spirituality means more than simply feeling good about it. What good is it to be deeply centered if you do not express your inner state of being? "Walking your talk," by living a congruent life gives a person an inner lift, a sparkle in the eyes that other people will notice. And when you get to the point where you have developed an abiding inner peace, the things you choose to do with your life will by nature be those that will extend and enrich it. Try making a list of the values you hold most dear, and consciously live by one of them each day.

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SIDEBAR

Steps to Longevity

Body

- ✓ Eat a variety of unprocessed, whole foods each day.
- ✓ Eat garlic regularly for heart health, turmeric to reduce inflammation, and take a good omega-3 supplement to protect the brain.
- ✓ Exercise daily to increase health and slow the aging process.
- ✓ Take a multivitamin/mineral supplement to "fill in the gaps" of a modern diet.
- ✓ Eat less and detoxify your body at least once a year.

Mind

- ✓ Laugh deeply and daily.
- ✓ Watch funny movies, tell stories, and enjoy jokes with friends and family.
- ✓ Acknowledge your mental and emotional wounds and work to heal them through therapy.
- ✓ Explore EFT, which can provide rapid and lasting relief from mental and emotional issues.

Spirit

- ✓ Take time to meditate, pray, or be still each day.
- ✓ Journal about your feelings, fears, and dreams.
- ✓ Seek out a spiritual teacher and learn what he or she has to offer.
- ✓ Make a list of spiritual attributes that you admire or desire and live one to the fullest each day.
- ✓ Give thanks for all the good things in your life, and acknowledge the growth opportunities that challenges present.