

Aging Gracefully

It's No Mystery: We Now Know How

KATHLEEN BARNES



Most of us like to think that we'll be vibrant, energetic, smart and yes, gorgeous, until the end of our lives. This isn't an unattainable fantasy—even if past poor lifestyle choices may have tarnished some much-anticipated Golden Years.

Fortunately, it's never too late (or too early) to make key small changes that will immediately and profoundly influence our ability to live long and healthy lives. Experts recommend that a handful of simple, scientifically validated health strategies will help us age gracefully and beautifully.

"Most of us are living longer, but not necessarily better," advises Dr. Arlene Noodleman, medical codirector of Age Defy Dermatology and Wellness, in Campbell, California. "Many people face decades of chronic debilitating disease, but you can minimize or even eliminate that period of life and maximize health. It's all about your lifestyle."

Rules to Live By

Whether the goal is disease prevention, retaining a sharp mind, weight control, balancing hormones, maintaining good posture or supporting glowing skin, all the experts *Natural Awakenings* asked agree on a core strategy that can extend life and improve its quality in later years:

Take a walk. Or, undertake another enjoyable form of outdoor exercise for about 30 minutes a day.

Greet the sun. Exposing bare skin to sunlight for 15 minutes three times a week allows natural production of vitamin D. Researchers at Boston University, Harvard University and others attest that sufficient doses of the vitamin help prevent cancer, heart disease, diabetes, depression, obesity, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis, relieve menopausal symptoms and support longevity.

Drink plenty of water. Hydration is key to cell health and overall proper body functions. Aim for consuming one ounce of water every day for every two pounds of body weight.

Eat a healthy diet. This means lots of vegetables and fish, some lean meats and poultry and moderate amounts of fruits and grains for weight control; abundant antioxidants to prevent deterioration that leads to chronic disease; and vital nutrients to support and extend life. Avoid sugars in all forms, simple carbohydrates, processed foods and for many, wheat and wheat gluten, especially for those with excess abdominal fat.

Get a good night's sleep. Eight hours is more than beauty sleep. Studies consistently report that it's essential

Whole-Body Dry Brushing

Dry brushing stimulates oil production, circulation that tightens skin and lymphatic drainage for detoxification and improved immune function. It also exfoliates. Using a moderately stiff brush with a long handle, start with the

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for energy and the prevention of a host of diseases, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer (*Nurses' Health Study*; plus UK research in *Diabetes Care*, the *European Heart Journal* and *British Journal of Cancer*). Regular turning in and waking times, plus sleeping in a dark room, are important to optimize melatonin production; it is not true that we need less sleep as we age.

Use the right supplements. Take a high-quality multivitamin every day, preferably an organic product based on whole foods for optimum nutrition. Fish oil is also essential for nearly everyone for heart, brain and joint health. Vitamin D is critical, especially in the winter months and for darker-skinned people that need greater sun exposure to manufacture it. Also add curcumin; according to numerous clinical studies, including those from Baylor University and the University of California-Los Angeles, it can help prevent and even reverse cancer, Alzheimer's, osteoarthritis, skin diseases and digestive disorders.

Prevent Dementia

Caregivers for parents or other relatives with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia are often concerned about experiencing such regression themselves. "There is some evidence that a tendency to memory loss can be inherited, but in any case, there are things you can do to prevent and even possibly reverse memory loss," counsels Noodleman.

Reducing stress is the best way to keep a sharp mind, she says. "Chronic stress inhibits the cerebral cortex (the brain's gray matter, responsible for higher mind function, including memory), resulting in a lack of judgment and other impaired brain function. So, manage stress and memory function will improve."

Deep breathing and increased oxygenation of the blood helps relieve stress and deliver nutrients to brain cells. Practicing yoga postures like the shoulder stand and headstand, or exercises using an inversion table, for just a few minutes a day can improve circulation to the brain and may help keep brain cells intact.

"It's important to keep brain cells healthy and alive by keeping blood sugars and blood pressure under control," urges Doctor of Osteopathy Lisa Ganghu, an internal medicine specialist and clinical assistant professor at New York University's Langone Medical Center, in New York City. High blood pressure and diabetes are risk factors for strokes and mini-strokes that result in brain cell impairment, she says, adding, "Some research even suggests that caffeine may improve memory and focus."

"Use it or lose it," concludes Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, an integrative medical authority from Kona, Hawaii, and author of *Real Cause, Real Cure*. Extensive research shows that challenging the brain with puzzles and language courses, having an active social life and getting regular exercise are all related to maintaining optimum brain health.

"People who age gracefully are physically and mentally active," adds Noodleman.

feet and vigorously brush eight long, smooth strokes in each of the listed areas, always brushing toward the heart:

- Soles of the feet
- Tops of the feet
- Calves
- Shins
- Both sides of lower legs
- Upper thighs
- Inner thighs
- Backs of thighs
- Buttocks
- Lower back
- Sides (love handles)
- Belly
- Breasts (very gently)
- Chest
- Palms of hands
- Forearms, front and back
- Upper arms, inside, outside and back
- Upper back and shoulders
- Neck (brush toward the face in this instance only)
- Face (use a softer cosmetic brush or similar device)

Source: Teresa Tapp, an exercise physiologist and nutritional counselor, in Safety Harbor, FL



Prevent Disease

A proper diet is a good place to start to take control. Ganghu recommends largely plant-based diets, like the Mediterranean, to keep common repercussions of aging at bay.

COFFEE KLATCH REDEMPTION

New research from the Harvard School of Public Health confirms that drinking two or three cups of coffee a day can help deal with the following risks later in life.

Alzheimer's - may slow or stop the formation of beta-amyloid plaque.

(University of South Florida, *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*)

Cancer - antioxidant properties may lower the risk of hormonally related cancers like endometrial, aggressive prostate and estrogen-negative breast cancers. (University of Massachusetts, *Nutrients*)

Diabetes - helpful for short-term blood glucose control; long-term use increases the body's level of adipoectin, a hormone that assists in blood sugar control and insulin production.

(Kyushu University, Japan, *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*)

Heart attack - moderate use has been associated with a slightly lower risk in women. (Tohoku University, Japan, *The Journal of Nutrition*)

Stroke - up to four cups [maximum] a day may lower the risk of stroke. (Kyung Hee University, Korea, metaanalysis, *Korean Journal of Family Medicine*)

Caveat: Excessive amounts of caffeine can also cause health

Teitelbaum contravenes traditional medicine's stance and says that most people don't need to worry about salt intake, even if they suffer from high blood pressure, noting, "Research shows that people that follow the national guidelines for salt intake tend to die younger. Instead, it's important to keep magnesium and potassium levels up by adding 200 milligrams of magnesium and 500 milligrams of potassium to your supplement regimen every day."

To prevent and control diabetes, Teitelbaum emphasizes, "Avoid sugar; it causes premature cell aging that affects all body systems." He explains that excess sugar and its byproducts age and stiffen cells. Dozens of studies directly link sugar and aging, including a PLoS Genetics study from the University of Montreal. (Also see Tinyurl.com/GlycationExplained.)

Reproducing cancer cells typically don't die as other cells in the human body are programmed to. Recent research by Baylor University and others based on the Human Genome Project strongly suggests that curcumin taken as a dietary supplement (400 mg a day or more) can persuade cancer cells to commit suicide and stop their wild and potentially fatal reproduction.

Ganghu further recommends limiting exposure to environmental toxins from sources such as common garden and household chemicals and agricultural spraying (choose organic for safety).

Weight Control

A large body of research from institutions such as the National Institute on Aging and the International Longevity Center shows that avoiding obesity and managing weight is paramount for longevity, as well as for preventing many of the diseases associated with aging. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that people with a body mass index (BMI) over 35 are at an 18 percent higher risk of earlier death from all causes than those that maintain a normal body weight (BMI of 25 or under).

Hormones can be a factor in weight gain for perimenopausal and menopausal women, says Ganghu, so it is important to be tested. She also notes, "A loss of muscle mass due to aging can affect weight because muscle tissue is metabolically more active than fat tissue, creating a vicious circle." She recommends strength training to improve muscle strength and mass.

Typically, two 20-minute sessions a week with moderate weights are enough to create "Michelle Obama arms," says Kathy Smith of Park City, Utah, a DVD fitness

issues, especially as we age. Consult with a health professional to determine usage appropriate to the individual.



entrepreneur and a spokesperson for the International Council on Active Aging.

Good Posture

"We spend a lot of time driving, working on computers and other activities with our arms in front of us. This causes chest muscles to contract and become tight as we age, drawing the head forward and rounding the spine, which produces a pronounced slouch," says Smith, author of *Feed Muscle, Shrink Fat Diet*.

Bending, stretching and strength training strengthens the shoulder and back muscles that help us stay upright. Smith recommends a "walking desk", essentially a treadmill with a board across the arms where a laptop can rest, and the user walks at only one to two miles per hour. "You're moving, not sitting, and that is really important," says Smith.

Yoga postures like the cobra and the bow are also helpful, as are visits to a chiropractor or other structural therapist.

Healthy Skin

"Your skin is a roadmap of your overall health," says Dr. Rick Noodleman, a dermatologist who practices anti-aging medicine in California's Silicon Valley with his wife. He explains that skin aging is caused by the three D's: deflation, descent and deterioration. All of them can be reversed.

Deflation is the loss of volume and moisture, which can be offset by proper internal hydration, healthy nutrition and good moisturizers. "People can make new collagen well into their 80s and even 90s," he says. Deterioration is the loss of skin tone and elasticity that can accompany stress, poor diet and lack of exercise.

Noodleman recommends regular exfoliation of skin on the face (an economical home facial with baking soda and water or eggs is high on his list) and dry brushing the whole body. He also notes that new laser treatments, acupuncture facelifts and other spa treatments can help temporarily minimize wrinkles and bring back a youthful glow.

It's not hard to be vibrant, healthy and energetic at any age if one is living a healthy lifestyle. "I feel like I am 30. I expect to feel that way for the rest of my life," says the 60-something Teitelbaum. "Of course, I'm not at the beach in a Speedo," he quips. "Who wants to look 20? There is also a certain beauty in age."

Kathleen Barnes is a freelance writer, book author and blogger. Her most recent title is 10 Best Ways to Manage Stress. Learn more at KathleenBarnes.com.

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