

The Road to Longevity

By Drs. Ronald Klatz and Robert Goldman

Harvard scientists have observed that the shortest-living Americans are Native American populations in South Dakota, living an average lifespan of 66.5 years, whereas the longest-living Americans are Asian-American women residing in Bergen County, N.J., who live to an average lifespan of 91.1 years. That's a nearly 25-year difference! Just think about what you could do with 25 "extra" years, particularly if you could enjoy them with sound body and mind. Here's what science says about the best ways to stay healthy, active and vital into your older years.

1. Choose Wisely

A study that followed 20,000 men and women, ages 45 to 79, for 13 years found that poor lifestyle choices can shorten lifespan by as many as 14 years. The researchers found that study subjects with the lowest number of healthy behaviors were four-times more likely to die during the study period, most notably from [cardiovascular disease](#). In fact, participants with the lowest healthy lifestyle scores had the same risk of dying as someone with the highest healthy lifestyle scores who was 14 years older.

Here are four beneficial lifestyle behaviors identified as contributing to longevity: smoking cessation, associated with an 80 percent improvement in lifespan; increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables; moderate drinking; and staying physically active.

Source: Khaw KT, et al. "Combined Impact of Health Behaviours and Mortality in Men and Women: The EPIC-Norfolk Prospective Population Study." *PLoS Med*, Jan. 8, 2008;5(1):e12 (Epub ahead of print].

2. Why Risk It?

Adding support to the above, a study of 23,153 German men and women, ages 35 to 65 years, found that four lifestyle factors slashed the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer by 80 percent: never smoking, body mass index of 30 or less, exercising 3.5 hours a week, and eating a healthy diet. The study authors concluded: "The message is clear. Adhering to 4 simple healthy lifestyle factors can have a strong impact on the prevention of chronic diseases."

Source: Ford ES, et al. "Healthy Living Is the Best Revenge: Findings from the European Prospective Investigation Into Cancer and Nutrition-Potsdam study." *Arch Intern Med*, Aug. 10, 2009;169(15):1355-62.



3. Don't Weight Around

A 12-year study involving more than 11,000 adult participants found that underweight people were 70 percent more likely to die during the study period compared to people of normal weight, and that [the extremely obese](#) had a 36 percent increased risk of death compared to their healthier counterparts. Interestingly, carrying a few extra pounds was found to be protective against early death; modestly overweight subjects were 17 percent less likely to die early, suggesting that when it comes to weight, eating habits, etc., moderation may be the key.

Source: Orpana HM, et al. "BMI and Mortality: Results From a National Longitudinal Study of Canadian Adults." *Obesity*, June 18, 2009 [Epub ahead of print].

4. Maximize Movement

A study of 2,401 twins that tracked their physical activity level, lifestyle habits, and examined the length of the telomeres in their white blood cells (leukocytes) revealed that men and women who were less physically active in their leisure time had shorter leukocyte telomeres than those who were more active. The mean difference in leukocyte telomere length between the most active subjects (who performed an average of 199 minutes of physical activity per week) versus the least active subjects (16 minutes of physical activity per week) was 200 nucleotides. This translated to mean that "the most active subjects had telomeres the same length as sedentary individuals up to 10 years younger, on average."

Source: Cherkas LF, et al. "The Association Between Physical Activity in Leisure Time and Leukocyte Telomere Length." *Arch Intern Med*, Jan. 28, 2008;168(2):154-8.

5. Find Your Happy Place

A study that assessed personality traits among 2,359 generally healthy people who enrolled in 1958 in the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging found that men and women who are emotionally calm and organized lived longer than people with less positive personality traits such as anxiousness, anger, or fearfulness. Men and women who scored above average in measures of general activity, emotional stability, or conscientiousness lived an average of two to three years longer than those who scored below average. The researchers concluded: "Enduring cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies have significant influence on health and longevity."

Source: Terracciano A, et al. "Personality Predictors of Longevity: Activity, Emotional Stability, and Conscientiousness." *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 2008; 70:621-627; published online ahead of print.

6. Don't Tempt Cancer

A report issued jointly by the World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research suggests many types and cases of cancers could be prevented [by not smoking](#), a habit estimated to cause one-third of malignancies. Further, they observe that one-third of cancers are preventable by proper diet, adequate physical activity, and avoiding obesity. "The message coming out of this report is that many, many more cancers are preventable by healthy patterns of diet, weight, and physical activity."

Source: "Healthy Food, Exercise, Keys to Cancer Prevention," MedPageToday.com; reporting on Policy and Action for Cancer Prevention (www.dietandcancerreport.org/pr/?d=overview).

Optimize Your Longevity Potential

In summary, we share the findings from a study of 2,432 older adults who displayed exceptionally good health at baseline. The decade-long study, conducted by M.S. Kaplan, and colleagues and published in the *Journal of Gerontology Series A: Biological Sciences*, identified the most important predictors of excellent health as the following: absence of chronic illness, annual income over US\$30,000, never smoking, drinking alcohol in moderation, and maintaining a positive outlook (managing stress levels). The researchers concluded: "Many of these factors can be modified when you are young or middle-aged. While these findings may seem like common sense, now we have evidence of which factors contribute to exceptional health [as we age]."



As you can see, staying as healthy as possible for as long as possible and enjoying your golden years, rather than being weighed down by illness and disease, is in large part up to you and the choices you make now, regardless of age. The practical choices we make on an everyday basis are what help us achieve living an extended healthy lifespan. Take a little time and evaluate your current health in conjunction with your health care provider. Small, progressive changes can make a big difference in how long you live and the quality of life you enjoy.

Healthy Habits: Make the Right Choices and Increase Your Lifespan by Up to 25 Years!

When examining the latest research on factors contributing to longevity and lifelong health, it's not hard to see which behaviors can make a big difference, one way or the other. Here's what seems to keep cropping up as the best ways to maximize your healthy lifespan:

- Not smoking at all or quitting smoking
- Healthy diet, particularly consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Consistent physical activity in leisure time
- Maintaining a healthy weight / avoiding obesity
- Alcohol intake only in moderation
- Stress reduction / controlling anxiousness, anger, etc.

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