

11 Ways to Slow Aging

By Jonny Bowden, PhD, CNS

There's only one strategy that has been shown in experimental research to extend life span: calorie restriction. In rodents, fish, fruit flies, worms and monkeys -- eating less food makes you live longer. Of course the key to food reduction is making sure what you do eat is loaded with nutrients. Maintaining a healthy weight reduces all sorts of metabolic stresses on the body. A good place to start: try reducing calories by 25 percent a day.

Eat Less Sugar

Sugar depletes the body of important minerals needed for a smoothly functioning metabolism. It depresses the immune system, making your body less able to mount an attack on health-robbing pathogens. High-glycemic diets -- high in sugar or high in processed and refined foods like bagels which convert to sugar almost instantly -- have now been found to be associated with several types of cancer. High sugar diets raise triglycerides and increase the risk for metabolic syndrome, diabetes and heart disease, all conditions that can potentially shorten your life.

Worry Less About Cholesterol

Cholesterol used to be considered a two-party system, the "good" and the "bad," but it's actually far more complex. LDL, so-called "bad" cholesterol, actually has a half dozen varieties -- some of which are not dangerous at all. Concentrating on cholesterol alone diverts our attention from the larger picture when it comes to heart disease risk. The ratio of triglycerides to HDL cholesterol (it should be under 5) is a far better predictor of heart disease than overall cholesterol. And basic lifestyle modifications (giving up cigarettes, exercising and lowering your weight) have a far more profound effect on mortality than your cholesterol ever did.

Quiet Your Mind

Stress is a component of nearly every major disease. The stress hormone cortisol ages the brain by literally shrinking the hippocampus, which is essential to memory and thinking. High levels of cortisol also cause you to put on fat around the middle. The only thing that's been consistently shown to bring down stress is meditation. Taking a few minutes a day to quiet your mind, calm your nervous system, lower your heart rate and oxygenate your brain with deep breathing can pay off in health dividends beyond your wildest dreams.

Eat Fish

The omega-3's in fish are among the most heart-healthy nutrients on the planet. Eating fish is a big component of nearly every native diet that has been shown to be associated with lower rates of heart disease, the number one killer of Americans. Fish can help

lower blood pressure, improve mood and feed your brain, things that are all associated with healthier (and longer) lives. Many health experts recommend at least ½ gram of fish oil a day from fish or supplements. You can meet the World Health Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (WHO-NATO) recommendations by consuming two servings of fatty fish per week.

Make Connections

The longest lived and healthiest people are those with connections to something outside themselves. For over two decades, research has shown that people with few social connections are far more likely to have poor mental health, poor physical health and to die prematurely. Social support networks extend life. Taking care of someone or something outside yourself is life-extending and health enriching. People who are connected to their extended families, or to their churches, synagogues or communities, or who spend some time volunteering and helping others rate themselves as happier, more satisfied and more fulfilled.

Check Your Levels

Doctors don't routinely check homocysteine levels, but they should. According to some experts, the lower your homocysteine, the better off you are. A level of 9umol/L or less is generally considered optimal. Those with dangerously high levels of homocysteine have a 50 percent greater risk of heart attack. And 40 percent of deaths due to stroke are associated with high homocysteine. The good news is it's a cinch to bring your levels down by supplementing with three B vitamins -- folic acid, vitamin B6 and vitamin B12.

Exercise Regularly

There's no better anti-aging strategy in the world than daily exercise. In some studies, it's been found to be as effective against depression as an anti-depressant. It strengthens bones, keeps muscles toned, improves flexibility, increases circulation, lowers blood pressure and improves blood sugar control. And it keeps oxygen flowing to the brain, heart and lungs. And according to new research, regular exercise can not only increase the ability of the brain to function, but it can actually increase its size. The best anti-aging exercise program incorporates both cardiovascular and weight training to keep your muscles strong, toned and youthful, help control your weight and keep your metabolic rate humming.

Lower Inflammation

When you stub your toe, chemicals in the body rush to the injured area, filling it with fluid and surrounding the injured areas with chemicals that can help fight infection. That's inflammation -- and it's part of the healing process. Problem is, many of us are walking around in a chronic state of low-grade inflammation. That's not good. The dark side of inflammation is that it can damage arteries, nerve cells and the immune system. Inflammation is a component of every degenerative disease including Alzheimer's, obesity, diabetes and heart disease. What to do? Eat fruits, vegetables and fish! The

phytochemicals and omegas found there serve as powerful, natural anti-inflammatories, lowering the risk for cancer, heart disease and other diseases of aging.

Sensible Sunlight

Vitamin D is one of the most underrated vitamins in the world. Your body makes it, but only when you're exposed to sunlight. Vitamin D enhances performance, fights cancer and builds bones. Older adults who don't get enough are at increased risk for both poor physical performance and for disability. It's possible -- but difficult -- to get enough vitamin D from food. We need the sun. For most Caucasians who are living where there is sunlight, exposing 10 percent of your body a couple times a week is enough to get your vitamin D requirement. Darker people or people who live in the northern latitudes need more. Don't be sun phobic. Sensible sun could extend your life.

Drink Up

Red wine contains resveratrol a compound that's been found in research to extend life. It's the ultimate anti-aging nutrient. Resveratrol is also found in the skins of dark grapes, as well as in peanuts. A ton of research has shown that moderate drinking -- no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink per day for women -- is good for the heart and circulatory system. But remember -- alcohol is addictive for many people, and drinking is a major cause of preventable death. Women drinkers especially should make sure to also supplement with folic acid, as even one drink a day can increase the risk for breast cancer if you're folic acid deficient.