

# a youthful approach to AGING

Holding on to, or recapturing, our youth has become the world's top obsession. The number of ways to achieve it counts as high as the number of so-called experts with an opinion on how to do it. But it seems clear that among the potions and lotions, the diets, the pills and the legion of dos and don'ts, there remain some logical suggestions: keep moving, physically and mentally and don't forget to have a downright good time. For it's not our age that matters, it's our attitude.

writer judy chapman





We are living far longer than ever before. Most populations are also living far more healthily than before. Quite apart from the burden this puts on the world – medically, socially and economically – the importance given to defying this natural phenomenon is growing daily. Whether with an ultimate goal of vanity, independence or community, it is essential that we keep ourselves healthy in order to minimise that burden.

There are many things in life that accelerate our aging. Stress, poor diet, a lack of exercise and pollution contribute to inflammation, oxidation and glycation, which all take their toll on our outward appearance – our skin. Physically, exactly the same elements of stress, poor diet and inadequate exercise apply. But according to experts, the most significant key to aging well is to keep our brain functioning.

Dr. Sonia Lupien from Canada's McGill University confirms that a positive attitude to aging can affect how long and how healthily we live. According to her research, aging is not a disease and nor does it mean inevitable decline. Rather, it should be seen as an opportunity – more time to explore the world, make a difference, try new things, meet new people, live in different countries, travel, and explore your relationship with life more deeply.

"It's never too late to have a happy childhood," says Professor Marc Cohen, Professor of Complementary Medicine at RMIT University in Australia, who believes the key to youthful aging is to rejuvenate and regain our child-like qualities. "As we age, we often lose our sense of wonder and awe. Look at how children share their emotions. They move from laughing to crying in a few moments. They can fully express their emotions and then let them go and move on.

Reawaken these child-like qualities. Be enthralled by life and fully share yourself. If we share our pain it decreases and if we share our joy it increases."

Once upon a time it was believed that the loss of our brain cells was an inevitable part of the aging process. It is now known that by exercising not only our body but significantly our brain, we can keep healthy until the last days of our life. The consensus is – if we don't use it we lose it. After all, our brain oversees every function of our body, from coordination to memory storage and communication; functions that make interaction with the world around us possible.

An analysis by Dean Keith Simonton, Professor of psychology at the University of California reveals that the brain is extremely malleable and any age we can benefit from learning new things. "Aging does seem

more kind to the intellectually and physically active," he says. "To be sure, there are certain infirmities of old age that cannot be overcome no matter what, at least for certain people with the predisposition, like Parkinson's or heart disease. But with these exceptions, you can always slow the aging process by learning new things, doing new things (or lots of old things).

"Just yesterday I was at a scientific conference in which I had the pleasure to meet Murray Gell-Mann who received the Nobel Prize for physics. He was born in 1929, but his intellect could knock the socks off of researchers half his age. He shows a breadth of knowledge, curiosity, and enthusiasm for the new that keeps his mind finely honed."

Dr. Andrew Weil MD, America's leading expert on healthy aging, says that the concept for anti-aging is wrong from the start as there are so many variables. His advice? Let's forget about anti-aging and obsessions with life extension. Instead let's focus on preventing or minimising the impact of age-related disease and learn how to age gracefully. In his book *Healthy Aging* he suggests we re-think our negative perceptions, likening aging with words like decay, ancient, bygone and dated. Why not look upon aging as enduring, lasting, seasoned and wise?

Little wonder then that Miraval Resort ([www.miravalresort.com](http://www.miravalresort.com)) has employed him as their Director of Integrative Health & Healing. Now, through various workshops and retreats that blend lectures, discussions, spa and cuisine, guests depart with inspiration on how to age gracefully.

Similarly, Leslie Kenton, author of best selling *Age Power* agrees that growing older means growing wiser, healthier, being more creative and fulfilled as you move towards greater authenticity, personal power and freedom. She explains there is a paradigm shift happening in our world today as scientists and researchers all over the world discover remarkable ways to absorb nutrient-rich foods, slow down if not reverse degeneration in the body and introduce a host of delivery systems for skincare rejuvenation – all of which she says will change forever the way we think about aging.

In the meantime though, the best advice for anti-aging is this: book that holiday you've always dreamed about; look into an Italian or wine appreciation class to keep your senses alive; take up hiking with a bunch of friends, or even better, strangers; make new friends; get up early and do a yoga class; walk to work taking a different route. Do things a bit differently. It's never too late to start enjoying your life.

# 5 secrets to living longer

## ACTIVATE YOUR BRAIN

To prevent your mind turning to mush, hang out with people who have stimulating conversations, learn a language, do crosswords and tricky games. Keep your brain permanently at the 'brain gym'.

## KNOW THYSELF

Think for yourself. Nobody knows more about your life than you do. Acting according to your inner self's wisdom determines your destiny. Steer clear of allowing institutions, companies, bosses and others have power over you. Think for yourself, from within yourself.

## HAVE A REASON TO GET UP IN THE MORNING

We've all heard stories about amazing people who die soon after retiring, so keep a purpose in life. Volunteering can be a very satisfying path. If you don't have a burning passion then help those that do. Get involved, emotionally as well as physically and mentally.

## LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

It's well documented that in regions where there's a strong sense of community care, you'll find a higher incidence of centenarians. Okinawa in Japan, for example, is reported as having the longest living people in the world (as is Japan in general) and a tradition of community support.

## EAT ANTI-AGING FOODS

Most experts say that the best anti-aging diets are those focusing on whole foods and liquids rather than vitamins and supplements. Recommended are foods high in essentially fatty acids, minerals, vitamins, and proteins as well as anti-inflammatory and low sugar diets, foods high in antioxidants (berries, grapes, red cabbage, beetroot, dark leafy greens, olive oil, dark chocolate, red wine as well as tea high in polyphenols). Eating organic has recently been proven to deliver an increase in the percentage of nutrition compared with non-organic foods. Steer clear of refined and processed foods. And eat moderate amounts. 🌱

### aging statistics

The aging population is a triumph of medical, social and economic advances  
 In 2006 there were 500 million people aged 65 and over  
 In 2030 there will be 1 billion older people – that's 1 in every 8 of the earth's inhabitants  
 In most places in the world people are living longer and healthier  
 People over 85 are part of the fastest growing portion of several national populations  
 Major causes of death are no longer infectious diseases and accidents  
 Currently age related chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, dementia, Alzheimer's, cancer, arthritis and diabetes are the major causes of death  
 These are the diseases we should all be aware of fighting, long before we approach 65  
**Why Population Aging Matters: A Global Perspective**  
 Department of State and the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health, Washington, DC  
 At the March 15th 2007 Summit on Global Aging