

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## Live to 100: Tips for Healthy Aging

The number of people living longer is increasing dramatically. An estimated 4.2 million U.S. residents now fall into the age group of the “oldest old”—85 years and older—with more than 40,000 having reached the age of 100. In fact, centenarians (those 100 and older) are the fastest-growing subpopulation of the elderly, and by 2050, according to census projections, 1 million Americans will celebrate their 100th birthdays.

At the same time, a growing body of evidence suggests that good genes are only a small part of the longevity puzzle. In fact, researchers now believe that chronic illness is not an inevitable consequence of aging, but it results more often from lifestyle choices that we’re perfectly free to reject.

So what are centenarians’ secrets to healthy old age? Experts recommend the following:

### **Embrace a Positive Attitude**

Centenarians tend to be very optimistic and always hope for the best. According to research, having a positive attitude is key to the ability to live longer and can lead to a healthier, higher quality of life. Researchers speculate that positive emotions may directly affect overall health, perhaps through direct mechanisms, such as immune function, or indirectly, for example, by strengthening social support networks.

### **Stimulate Your Mind**

Research shows the more educated we are, the longer we live. And the benefits of education are even more pronounced when learning continues throughout our lives. Most centenarians take advantage of opportunities and possibilities that have not been available to them earlier in their lives, such as second careers, volunteer activities, musical instruction, writing, various classes in areas of interest or travel. In addition, you may want to consider mentally challenging activities such as crossword puzzles or learning a new language.



### **Limit Stress and Stay Connected**

Protect your mental and physical health by managing your stress at work and at home. Humor, meditation, exercise and optimism are good ways to naturally reduce stress and relieve tension.

Stay in touch with family and friends. Those who maintain a close network of social support do best. Social contacts may encourage us to take better care of ourselves—by cutting down on smoking and drinking, for example, or seeking medical treatment earlier for symptoms that may indicate serious problems. Friends may also help us get through difficult times by offering coping mechanisms and having a positive effect on mood and self-esteem.

### **Take Advantage of Your Genes**

Good health practices will help you make up for at least some of the genetic difference between you and centenarians. Essentially, you can compensate for bad genes by healthy living—or ruin perfectly good genes

with poor habits. Smoking and excessive alcohol intake, for example, increase the risk of many chronic diseases. As you age, be sure to get regular health screenings.

## Support Your Body with Exercise

Find fun ways to stay in shape, such as dancing, gardening, swimming, walking or jogging. Include strength training, as directed by a personal trainer or health care provider, to maintain muscle mass. Increased muscle tissue burns fat more efficiently, reduces your heart disease risk, and lessens your chance of a broken hip from falling. For adults, a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week is recommended.

## Make Healthy Diet Choices

What you eat and drink—and what you don't eat and drink—can make a big difference to your health. To prevent weight gain and maintain good health, pay special attention to eating efficiently. Choose foods that maximize nutritional value and minimize calories. Overly processed foods often contain more calories and fewer nutrients. Choose, instead, whole, natural foods like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, good (unsaturated) fats, nuts, legumes and healthy sources of protein (white meat, fish and eggs).

## Choose a Good Health Care Provider

Even if you are healthy and make good preventative choices, it is essential to have access to a good, trustworthy health care provider.

A health care provider should:

- Know and support all forms of healing and various approaches to health care to present patients with the most effective, safest preventative or treatment options available.
- Emphasize prevention and whole-person wellness.
- Teach healthy living practices.
- Involve patients in decisions regarding their care—except for acute, potentially life-threatening emergencies.
- Encourage patients to be responsible for their health.

## Life Expectancy Calculator

To learn more about how you can change your lifestyle for the better, visit [www.livingto100.com](http://www.livingto100.com).

The “Living to 100 Life Expectancy Calculator” was designed to translate what researchers have learned from studies of centenarians into a practical tool to estimate a person's longevity potential.

This tool will tell you your approximate life expectancy, and it will give you the opportunity to go back and change your answers to see how changes in your behavior might affect your life expectancy.

## Chiropractic Care Can Help

Talk to your doctor of chiropractic about other ways to improve your quality of life. Doctors of chiropractic are trained and licensed to examine and treat the entire body with specific emphasis on the nervous and musculoskeletal systems, wellness and prevention. ■

### Sources:

1. [www.healthandage.com/html/min/new\\_england/index.htm](http://www.healthandage.com/html/min/new_england/index.htm).
2. Sweere J. Golden Rules for Vibrant Health in Body, Mind, and Spirit. Basic Health Publications (August 1, 2004).

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For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at [www.acatoday.org](http://www.acatoday.org) or call 800-986-4636.

*Angela Kargus, Writer*

*Nataliya Schetchikova, PHD, Editor*