



The Top 5 Ways to Live Longer, Stronger and Happier

Written by Dr Maoshing Ni at *The Huntington Post* on November 27, 2010

Life in the 21st century can certainly derail our longevity plans! Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, too little physical activity, unhappiness and daily stress are five major rapid-aging culprits that wreak havoc on our health and shorten our lifespan. Follow these tips to boost your longevity and stop those crow's feet from creeping up on you too soon:

1) Don't Worry, Be Happy

A smile a day can zap those wrinkles away! Did you know that it takes more muscles to create a frown than it does a smile? When was the last time you laughed so hard that you hunched over from a bellyache? Watch a comedy, tell a joke or have a fun game night with your friends. Several studies demonstrate how laughter can reduce inflammation and blood pressure, boost immunity and even burn calories. A study conducted in Vanderbilt University measured the amount of 50 calories burned in just 10 to 15 minutes of laughter. Turn that frown upside down and smile your way to health!

2) Move It or Lose It

Start your day with some exercise to kick your endorphins and metabolism up a notch or two! The best way to keep yourself active is to engage in activities that make you happy. Are you a yoga fan, or do you prefer to shimmy and shake your way to a lean physique? Aim for 20 to 30 minutes of daily activity to pump your heart with oxygen, strengthen and tone your body, and reduce your risk for disease. For every pound of muscle you gain, you burn an extra 35 to 50 calories each day, which can add up to 18,000 calories lost each year!

3) Eat Well to Live Well

We have all heard the old adage "you are what you eat," but do we follow it? Our bodies thrive on the nutrients we provide it, so in order to maintain our youth, vitality and energy we must feed our bodies whole foods. Temptations like added sugars, fried foods, alcohol and a host of other processed foods abound. To add years to your life, don't cave to these cravings, and instead consume antioxidant-rich fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and heart-healthy fats. Here's a trick: in general, the less ingredients a product has, the better it is for you; stick to the whole foods you find around the perimeter of your food market. Try roasting some sweet potatoes for an added punch of vitamin C, potassium and fiber. Steam folate-rich kale with a spritz of lemon juice for a phytochemical punch. Proper nutrition is essential for disease prevention, so eat that apple a day to keep the pills away.



4) Be a Sleeping Beauty

The average adult requires anywhere between six to nine hours of sound sleep every night in order to replenish and repair the body from the previous day's stress. Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to weight gain, impaired cognitive function, increased stress and an overall poor quality of life. Try limiting caffeine intake to the early morning hours, as it can last up to eight hours in the body. Turn off computers and phones and sleep in a dark room to prevent distractions. You may also try drinking a calming cup of chamomile tea an hour before bed to increase relaxation. Sweet dreams.

5) Get Stress-less!

One of the greatest factors of rapid aging is stress. However, when the body undergoes chronic emotional stress, it invites multiple diseases. It is important to find some time during the day to relieve our bodies of unwanted negativity. To foster tranquility, take at least five to 10 quiet minutes during the day to close your eyes and breathe slowly. Give yourself some time to do the activities that bring you joy, whether it's reading, talking with a friend, walking in nature or dancing. Music therapy can also enhance your emotional well-being and reduce anxiety. In a study published in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, patients with chronic pain who listened to music on headphones for one hour each day reported less pain and depression, as well as a sense of more control. Whether you're a Mozart or Madonna fan, turn up the radio and shake off the stress.

May you live long, live strong and live happy!