



LIVE UP TO 14 YEARS LONGER WITH THESE SIMPLE TIPS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



According to the research of Professor Longo, new guidelines show that a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases up to 80%, and the risk of tumors up to 60%.

Three out of four deaths from cardiovascular diseases and half of deaths from cancer are likely caused by an unhealthy lifestyle. Is there hope for beating these odds? Can anything be done to improve our chances before such diseases?



To answer these questions, researchers led by Professor Frank B. Hu of Harvard University drew on the data of two extensive studies that analysed the US population.

The findings are astonishing: small changes in lifestyle can increase life expectancy by years.

What does this new study offer?

Published in the April 2018 issue of the prestigious journal *Circulation*, the findings of the research team at Harvard University, confirm findings previously reported in other scientific journals—yet, with a key difference. Whereas previous studies examined the populations of various countries, this study conducted a thorough and quantitative analysis targeting the US population only. Instead, a 2012 meta-analysis collected the data from more than a half million participants from the US, Europe, China, and Japan, for an average of 13 years. The data suggested that more than half (66%) of premature deaths are associated with an unhealthy lifestyle that includes smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, lack of exercise, poor dietary choices, and obesity.

The data pool was drawn from more than 120,000 people (78,865 women and 44,354 men, chosen from two groups commonly used as research subjects in epidemiology; these groups' traits are listed in below).

1. Who were the participants in the study?

The Harvard research team led by Professor Frank B. Hu used the data of two extensive studies that were conducted over 30 years and profiled over thousands of US health professionals, including both women (NHS, “Nurses Health Study”) and men (HPFS, “Health Professionals Follow-up Study”). The participants regularly fill out questionnaires on diet, health and other personal information (age, ethnicity, use of medicine, etc.)

This data was then integrated with that of the official program that evaluates the nutritional status of adults and children in the US (NHANES, The National Health and Nutritional



Examination Survey”), and with an online database used to analyse data on public health (CDC WONDER, “Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Wide-Ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research”).

The results? In contrast to less regimented peers of the same age, women who follow a healthy lifestyle can live as many as 14 years longer, while men have the potential to add 12 years to their lives. This means that when 50 years old, the life expectancy is increased by 43 years for women, and approximately 38 years for men—great news for those hoping to enjoy their retirement years with grandchildren or traveling around the world. The most important aspect is that these people also are healthier in their later years. In fact, the study determined that by following the proper guidelines, people have an 82% less chance of dying from cardiovascular diseases and 65% less chance of dying from tumors.

What does it mean to follow “a healthy lifestyle”?

Diet is without a doubt ranked at the top of factors determining overall health. In the Harvard-based study, a healthy diet is defined as one that emphasizes vegetables, fruit, nuts, whole grains, polyunsaturated fats and long-chain omega-3 fatty acids (prevalent in fish, for example, and nuts like walnuts and almonds, as well as extra-virgin olive oil). Instead, it restricts the consumption of red meat, sugary beverages, animal fats and sodium (too much salt). Harvard researchers measured a healthy diet by using an index called *The Alternate Healthy Eating Index*, which awards points based on the consumption of more or fewer of the above dietary products. Those participants scoring more than 40% are deemed to have a healthy diet as they consume food items considered healthy while limiting the unhealthy items.

Diet must be accompanied by a sufficient amount of moderate or intense **physical activity** at least 30 minutes a day (no need to join a gym—brisk or fast walking also counts!)



Not surprisingly, smoking should be avoided at all costs. Moreover, alcohol should be consumed in moderation; for men, this means approximately 2 small glasses of wine, 2 bottles of beer or 2 small shot glasses of hard alcohol (40 ml) a day, while for women half these amounts.

The last risk factor is weight, or rather Body Mass Index, known by the English acronym BMI, which is calculated by dividing your weight in kg by your height in meters. Your BMI should be between 18.5 and 24.9. For example, a person 1.6 meters should weigh between 47.5 and 64 kg, 55 kg being the ideal.

Do you want to find out if you have a healthy lifestyle? Answer the questions below.

2. What is your score?

Your lifestyle can be considered “healthy” if you responded “Yes” to these questions.

1. How does your diet compare to the Longevity Diet? Does it follow the same or similar guidelines?
2. Do you do a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise each day?
3. Are you a non-smoker?
4. Do you drink no more than 1 glass of wine per day (for women) or 2 for men?
5. Is your BMI between 18.5 and 24.9?

Why are these findings so important?

Well-being is not necessarily the same as good health. The US spends more than 17% of its GDP on healthcare. More resources are spent on developing new drugs and providing



treatment than on prevention. Like all industrialized nations, the US has witnessed a decrease in quality of life due to health issues connected to so-called chronic and non-communicable diseases (e.g., diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, autoimmune diseases, neurodegenerative diseases). Knowing how to change your lifestyle can help prevent these illnesses and improve your health. The larger benefit is that improvement in individual health, in turn, means vast benefits for the healthcare system of the entire nation.

Strengths and Limits of This Study

The study discussed in this article is epidemiologic in nature. As a discipline, epidemiology examines the effects of the behaviour of an entire population or group of people, in this case more than 120,000 people.

Still, the approach at the core of epidemiology is only one of five “Pillars” proposed by Professor Longo. This pillar allows us to sift through the massive amounts of information on nutrition, longevity, and health in order to identify the key factors that make for a healthy lifestyle. The other pillars include research focused on longevity; clinical studies; studies of individuals who are 100 years and over and populations with the highest longevity rates; and, finally, the study of complex systems.

Each pillar can provide useful information, but as each has strengths and limits, Professor Longo claims that it is only by using all five pillars in unison that we can produce the most reliable and durable indicators.

The multidisciplinary approach of the Pillars of Longevity lays out a solid and in-depth foundation from which to choose the best diet, while it minimizes, as much as possible, a key variable: change in dietary habits. If the choice of diet is made based on all 5 pillars, it is highly unlikely that such a choice will be wrong or invalidated by new research.



What can an individual do on a practical level to ensure better health and longevity?

If you did not answer “Yes” to all the questions in text box 2, your lifestyle has room to improve. Besides quitting smoking and reducing alcohol consumption, the first change that can improve your health is a healthy diet such as the **Longevity Diet** proposed by Prof. Longo, in the book of the same name and summarized in text box 3. The Longevity Diet is rich in plant-based foods such as vegetables and legumes, nuts, and primarily whole grains; good fats found in fish (best if small in size); and extra-virgin olive oil. Instead, it limits animal products (especially red meat, cold cuts or cured meats, and dairy products) and sugar. As for physical activity, all types of sports are equally effective. Best is to take up any activity that can be done on a daily basis, even past the age of 100! Brisk or fast walking; climbing the stairs instead of taking the elevator; and taking long walks on the weekend are small changes, but they can have significant effects on health.

The combination of a healthy diet and adequate physical activity will then naturally result in a healthy weight.

So then the question remains: “Are health problems inevitable? Or is there something we can do?” According to the studies cited in this article, making even small changes to one’s daily routine can be just as decisive a factor in ensuring good health as genetic predisposition.

Sources:

1. [Yanping Li, An Pan, Dong D. Wang, Xiaoran Liu, Klodian Dhana, Oscar H. Franco, Stephen Kaptoge, Emanuele Di Angelantonio, Meir Stampfer, Walter C. Willett, Frank B. Hu. “Impact of Healthy Lifestyle Factors on Life Expectancies in the US Population.” *Circulation*. 2018 Apr 30. doi: 10.1161/Circulationaha.117.032047](#)
1. [Loef M, Walach H. “The Combined Effects of Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors on All Cause Mortality: a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *PrevMed*. 2012;55:163–170. doi: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2012.06.017.](#)
1. [Longo, Valter. *The Longevity Diet*, Penguin, 2016](#)