

Live Well, Age Well by Anita Selby, 2009

You can spread expensive crèmes on your face, dye your hair and even get plastic surgery. However, there's a much more cost-effective and natural way to get an age 'lift'; it's called living well. Our physical, mental and emotional habits all contribute to how gracefully we enter our twilight years.

Numerous studies have connected a healthy lifestyle with feeling and looking young. Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables means you'll be filling your body not only with energy, but you will be absorbing loads of disease-fighting antioxidants that also slow the aging process. However, eating healthy is based on conscious decision-making. Truth is there is no one forcing you to put that cigarette in your mouth, or to eat those potato chips and wash it down with a chocolate bar. The choice is yours.

Another important habit that will help you feel younger is exercise. Not only does exercise keep your bones and muscles strong, but reduces stress and releases natural 'feel good' endorphins. Exercise does not have to be rigorous, and a 30-minute walk, three times a week can be sufficient. However, exercise again is a habit that you have to decide to make. You are in control and only you can make changes to your lifestyle. Keep in mind that new habits take approximately 30 days to develop, so don't get discouraged!

Being social also contributes to long life. A sense of belonging and purpose keeps your mind alert. Centenarians often play a significant role in the family or community. They maintain a healthy weight, do not smoke, handle stress well, are able to cope with loss, have a high degree of self-sufficiency, have a great sense of humor and look forward to the future. They often stay engaged in hobbies, volunteering and maintain plenty of interests. Many experience the ability to relax and sleep better, which consequently slows down the aging process and keeps energy levels up.

Some studies have suggested that adults over the age of 75 identify the following factors as important to aging: family and friends, health and wellbeing, spirituality, community involvement and new learning experiences. Social stimulation is a very important aspect of increasing your life expectancy. In fact, those who are socially isolated have a mortality rate that is more than two times as great as those who are socially active.

Making an effort to live healthy not only has immense personal benefits, but can also benefit our country as a whole. As our population ages, the demands that we will place on our health care system will be heavily taxed. As responsible citizens we need to start looking at ways that we can assist and ease this burden.

Henry Ford once said, "Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can't, either way you are right." Choosing to be healthy and to age well is a conscious decision. One that enhances quality of life, reduces stress, improves memory, and keeps you feeling more energetic and happier. And, if it means less visits to the doctor and less money spent on anti-aging products, it could mean a fuller wallet!

Anita Selby is author of *Re-create the Senior's Soul* and a recreational therapist who has worked with seniors for more than 20 years.



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