

# Forever Young – tips for preserving your health

As each generation lives longer and longer, we need to focus our attention on “quality” years and not just the number of years we live. Here is some excellent advice provided by Caretalk on preserving our health as we age into our 80s, 90s, and beyond.

The numbers are astonishing. More than 60,000 people in the United States are over the age of 100, and there are enough people over the age of 110 for them to have their own term: “super-centenarians.”

What’s the secret of their long lives? And, more importantly, are they exceptions to the rule? Perhaps, but maybe not. The fact is that we are living longer thanks to a combination of factors. According to the US Census, the number of people age 85 and over alone will more than double over the next 25 years. Further, it’s estimated that there will be more than 800,000 people 100 and over by 2050.

While all of us hope to live into our 80s or 90s or longer, our biggest concern is having a healthy long life. Preserving and even improving your health depends in large part on the choices and habits that you develop now and continue into the future.

A study of aging funded by the MacArthur Foundation bears this out. It found that environment and lifestyle contribute far more to a healthy old age than genetics, and that the importance of healthy habits only increases as you age. Taking care of your

## DR. PROODIAN’S PRESS



By Dr. James Proodian

physical well-being, challenging your mind, reaching out to others, and feeling positive about life and aging all contribute greatly to remaining active and sharp.

### Physical Health

One of the most important things you can do at any age is to eat right. A healthy, balanced diet has lots of benefits, including feeling better and looking better. But what does a healthy, balanced diet mean? Doctors recommend a diet heavy on fruits and vegetables, protein, complex carbohydrates (such as whole grain foods, legumes) and healthy fats (including olive oil).

As you consider your future health, this also might be a good time to try to lose any extra weight. Shedding pounds, along with eating the foods that are good for you, can help you to stave off some of the most serious age-related health problems, including osteoporosis, hypertension, diabetes and heart disease. Middle-aged weight gain, which tends to settle around our middle, is particularly dangerous because it increases the risk of stroke and heart disease.

But there’s another reason to eat right. The vitamins and min-

erals found in healthy foods boost our immune system and help our bodies to function better. Many fruits and vegetables, including berries, tomatoes and broccoli, contain phytochemicals, which improve cognitive functions and prevent disease. And Vitamin C, found in citrus fruits, helps us to handle stress better in addition to helping us fight off colds.

Many of us have busy lives with little or no time for exercise. But did you know that in addition to raising your metabolism, exercise can help to extend your life and improve the quality of your life for years to come? One study found that walking one hour a day can extend your life expectancy by two years.

Strength training is particularly beneficial to us as we age. At age 40, we begin to lose muscle mass each year, slowly becoming weaker. But strength training can rebuild lost muscle mass and make bones stronger, which is particularly important for post-menopausal women. It also improves your balance, helps you to sleep better and helps your heart.

One important finding of the MacArthur Foundation aging study is that it’s never too late to stop such bad habits as smoking, eating fatty foods and not exercising. Within a year of quitting smoking, most people reduce their risk of heart disease.

### Staying sharp, staying connected

Perhaps one of the most worri-

some signs of aging is diminished memory. But, contrary to popular opinion, we continue to grow brain cells throughout our lives, and adults of any age can improve their memory and increase their capacity for learning. Researchers say the mental decline many older people experience is because they aren’t taxing their brains enough. The nerve cells in their brains are atrophying due to largely routine behavior.

As with your body, the more you exercise your brain, the better it will function. While taking a class and developing new interests are among the many good options for challenging your brain, another thing you can do is to learn new skills. In an age of instant messaging, camera phones and continually faster and smarter computers, keeping up with new technological advances and mastering them will help preserve your mental acuity.

Taking steps to reduce stress also will help keep your brain functioning well as stress affects our memory and ability to learn new things, in addition to reducing the flow of blood to our brains.

As you consider your future, also look for activities that give your life meaning and keep you involved in your community. Being socially connected is important to our mental health and overall sense of well-being. Consider volunteering with a civic organization or your church. Further, stay in close contact with

friends and family and start expanding your social network now.

### A Positive Attitude

We’ve all heard of the mind-body connection, and as caregivers, perhaps you’ve even witnessed how one’s attitude can have an effect on one’s health. So another key factor in staying healthy is to look upon the future and aging positively. As the saying goes, the only constant in life is change, and those who remain flexible and adaptable age best. Those in the 100 plus club — the centenarians — confirm this. When a researcher looked at similarities among the attitudes of people older than 100, she found that they all stayed engaged with life, were able to cope with loss and had both a sense of humor and hope.

### Healthy Habits – Body

- Eat a balanced, healthy diet, including five helpings of fruits and vegetables a day
- Don’t consume “empty” calories from snacks like chips and candy bars
- Shed extra weight
- Never skip a meal; distribute calories equally among meals
- Remain physically fit; even activities like walking and gardening help
- Strength train to rebuild your muscle mass and keep your bones strong
- Adopt healthy habits; it’s

**Continued on next page**

# Forever Young

Continued from previous page

never too late to stop smoking

- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Get enough sleep
- Reduce stress; it accelerates

the body's aging process and kills memory

- Take time to relax

## Mind & Spirit

• Keep your mind active by doing things that exercise your memory

• Give of yourself; contribute time to your community

• Maintain social connections with friends, family, co-workers

• Seek inspiration

• Live life with hope and confidence

• Laugh often

• Have a positive attitude; see the glass as half full

• Be flexible and adaptable to change

- Maintain a future orientation

## Tips For Preserving Your Health

*In your 40s:*

- Have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked
- Get a mammogram

*In your 50s:*

• Lose the weight around your middle

• Get screened for cancer, especially colon cancer

- Get flu shots

• Boost your calcium

- Have prostate screening

*In your 60s*

• If retired, replace your co-workers with new friends and learn new things

- Get an eye exam

• If on several medications,

have them screened for possible drug interactions

*In your 70s:*

• Get tested for hearing problems

- Exercise your mind

*In your 80s:*

- Stay physically active

- Avoid falls

*At any age:*

- Get regular checkups

*Dr. James Proodian is an author, educator, and healthcare practitioner specializing in chiropractic rehabilitation and other natural healing techniques. He also provides free health seminars and screenings throughout Monmouth County with his "Wellness at Work" programs. To have him speak at your company, school, or organization, contact the Natural Healthcare Center at 732-222-2219. Dr. Proodian's other health articles can be found at [www.NaturalHealthcareCenter.com](http://www.NaturalHealthcareCenter.com).*