[IMAGE]

Healthy Aging

Natural Ways to Maintain a Youthful, Healthy Self

By Ronald Klatz, MD, and Robert Goldman, MD

While cosmetic surgery may make you look younger (for at least awhile), and a wide array of medications are available that claim to fight diseases attributable to aging and excess, there are easy ways to slow the aging process without having to resort to risky surgery or drugs. It's time to learn some of the natural secrets to healthy aging.

Last year, the U.S. government forecast that the nation's health care spending would consume an expanding share of the U.S. economy during the next decade. In 2007, U..S. health care spending stood at $2.2 trillion; officials predict it will approach $4.3 trillion by 2017 and account for nearly 20 percent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Healthy Aging Woman - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark One of the contributing factors to the surge in health care spending is the aging baby boomer population. In the U.S., men and women born between 1946 and 1964 are turning 60 at the rate of 330 per hour. They are also now cashing in on Medicare health benefits; by 2017 Medicare payouts will climb to $884 billion - more than one-fifth of all national health care spending and nearly double the program's spending in 2007. How long can such soaring spending continue? A number of public-policy experts predict Medicare will be bankrupt by 2019. One more reason to take control of your health today.

Fighting the Natural Aging Process

As we age, changes take place in our body systems. Cellular processes slow down, and our organs and tissues become less robust in performing their tasks and functions. From head to toe beginning as early as the second decade of life, believe it or not, our body systems begin to demonstrate signs of old age. That's the bad news; the good news is the diseases and disabilities of human aging are largely preventable and treatable. Evidence suggests we can delay or minimize these age-related changes with appropriate diet, exercise and lifestyle modifications. Here are a few natural ways to maintain youth and vitality with age, according to the latest research.

Maintain Your Metabolism

Loss of strength and muscle mass are common consequences of aging, as is the tendency to gain body fat. Preserving muscle mass is critically important for older adults, as frailty increases the risks of disability and disease. In a study published in the *Journal of Applied Physiology* last fall, Bret Goodpaster, from the University of Pittsburgh, and colleagues investigated whether increased physical activity could prevent or reverse losses in strength and skeletal muscle mass and weight gain in older adults. In a study involving 11 older men and 31 older women, all of whom were overweight and sedentary at the start of the study, the research team assigned each to one of three groups for 16 weeks: a reduced-calorie diet only, a supervised exercise regimen only, or a combination of reduced-calorie diet plus the exercise program.

At the conclusion of the study period, all three groups lost weight, but only the dietplus- exercise group improved their fitness levels, boosted their fat-burning capacity and minimized loss of muscle mass. According to the researchers, " Exercise seems to be key for maintaining muscle mass when older adults lose weight through dieting."

Go With the Flow

Studies have shown that people with relaxed personalities have a more stable mood and are better able to handle stressful situations without anxiety. They also may be better positioned to prevent age-related cognitive decline, suggests recent research. Dementia is the progressive loss and impairment of activities such as memory, behavior, personality, judgment, attention, spatial relations, language, abstract thought and other intellectual capacities. Alzheimer’s disease, the most common form of dementia, affects more than 26 million people worldwide.

Healthy Aging Woman - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark In a study involving 506 older Swedes, Hui-Xin Wang, of the Karolinska Institutet, and colleagues made an interesting discovery: men and women who were socially outgoing, but not easily distressed by circumstances, were 49 percent less likely to develop dementia over time, as compared to those who were extroverted but neurotic. A calm personality also was associated with a 49 percent reduced dementia risk in those who were not socially active compared to those who were stay-athomes, but prone to distress. According to the researchers, whose findings were published in Neurology, these results "provide further evidence that certain personality traits may play a role in dementia development, and that personalitylifestyle interactions may be especially important for determining dementia risk."

Bone Up on Bone Health

Your odds of suffering an osteoporotic fracture during your lifetime is 30-40 percent if you are a woman and 13 percent if you are a man. Katherine Tucker, from Tufts University in Massachusetts, and colleagues studied 213 men and 390 women, each age 75 and older, for four years and found that an increased intake of carotenoids, and particularly lycopene (found in foods such as tomatoes, watermelon and pink grapefruit) was associated with some level of protection against losses in bone mineral density (BMD) at the lumbar spine in women, and at the hip in men. In addition, male hip BMD was also associated with intakes of total carotenoids, beta-carotene, and lutein plus zeaxanthin. Study findings appeared in the January 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. The researchers postulate that the carotenoids may play a protective role in skeletal health via their antioxidant activity. Previous reports suggest oxidative stress may increase bone resorption; other mechanisms may play a contributory role as well.

Exercise Your Brain

A study on mice conducted by researchers at the National Cheng Kung University Medical College (Taiwan) suggests exercise can reverse the age-related decline in the production of neural stem cells in the brain's hippocampus. The study, published in the *Journal of Applied Physiology* in November 2008, suggests exercise promotes the production of neurotrophic factors and receptors, which then promote the production and maturation of new stem cells. While exercise enhanced stem cell production and maturation in middle-age mice, researchers note that the strongest beneficial effect was seen in younger mice.

Live the Anti-Aging Lifestyle

In the latest study that validates the anti-aging lifestyle for both extending lifespan and prolonging healthspan, Mark Kaplan, from Portland State University, and colleagues examined the maintenance of exceptionally good health among 2,432 seniors. They tracked participants' health for a 10-year period (1994 to 2004) and discovered that the most important predictors of excellent health over the entire decade were absence of chronic illness, never having smoked, and drinking alcohol only in moderation. In addition, maintaining a positive outlook and managing stress levels were positive contributors to health with age. According to the research team, the important point here is, "Many of these factors can be modified when you are young or middle-aged. While these findings may seem like common sense, now we have evidence of which factors contribute to exceptional health [as we age]."

Aging poses a costly burden to this nation, in terms of both financial and socioeconomic costs. Anti-aging medicine addresses aging as a treatable condition, aiming to reduce or eliminate the disabilities, diseases and dysfunctions we have grown used to assuming are a part of growing older. Take control of your health destiny today by understanding how your body systems age and what you can do about it. Talk to your doctor for more information on natural ways to maintain health into your golden years.

Top 10 Biological Systems That Decline With Age

- Endocrine system, responsible for the hormonal response
- Immune system, which mounts the body's response to infectious invaders
- Metabolic system, involving age-related physiology changes
- Cardiovascular system, involving the heart and arteries * Gastrointestinal system, affecting absorption of nutrients from food
- Reproductive system, including menopause (in women) and andropause (in men)
- Nervous system, responsible for the body's muscular response to stimuli
- Brain function, including memory and cognition
- Bone/muscular system, involving strength and function
- Sensory system, including the senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing

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