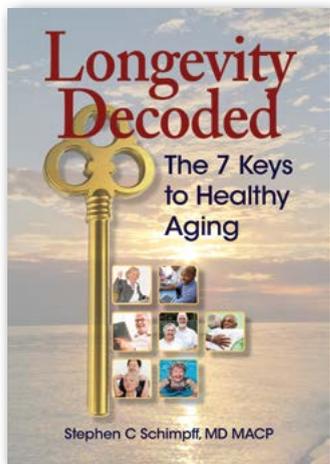


Live Long & Healthy

By Stephen Schimpff, MD

You can live a long and healthy life. There is no magic pill, injection, elixir or “Fountain of Youth” but you can achieve it with reasonably simple lifestyle modifications that cost absolutely no money. There are 7 “keys:”

1. *Eating the right foods*
2. *Getting the right exercise*
3. *Reducing and managing stress*
4. *Improving the quality of sleep*
5. *Eliminating tobacco*
6. *Remaining intellectually engaged*
7. *Staying socially involved*



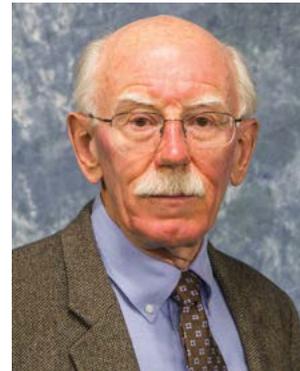
To understand how these keys can impact both your longevity and your health through the years, it is useful to understand a bit about how aging unfolds. There is an inexorable process that begins in early adulthood in which every bodily function begins to decline at about 1% per year. This is an average rate of decline; it varies from organ to organ, time to time and of course person to person but 1% is a good average to consider.

It is not appreciated at first because your organs and functions have enormous redundancy built in and because 1% per year is just not noticeable. But the decline eventually reaches a state where that organ's function is impaired enough to impact your daily living.

For example, bone strength declines ultimately leading to osteoporosis. Muscle strength is also declining as is balance function. The combination may mean that you lose your balance, your muscles are no longer strong enough to catch your fall and you hit the ground with a resultant broken hip. Similarly, steady cognitive decline leads to memory loss over time. Intestinal function such as absorption declines as does metabolism so that you need a nutrient dense but calorie light diet in order to get enough vitamins yet not too many calories.

Meanwhile, as aging progresses, the risk for developing complex chronic illnesses such as coronary artery disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes mellitus, rheumatoid arthritis or Alzheimer's disease accelerates. These are known as age prevalent diseases and many assume that they are just the inevitable result of getting older.

But in actuality, they are the result of how life was lived over the decades. For example, lung cancer is diagnosed, on average, at age 72 but it began with the teenager who went behind the garage to smoke that cigarette snatched from Dad's pack. A heart attack may occur at age 67 but the process that damaged the coronary arteries began long ago with diet, a sedentary lifestyle, uncontrolled chronic stress and inadequate sleep



– all leading to inflammation in the heart's blood vessels.

The aging process cannot be stopped and diseases cannot be entirely prevented but with modifications of lifestyles, the rate of decline can be significantly slowed and the risk of developing a chronic illness can be greatly reduced.

Consider that with lifestyle modifications you can slow the rate of decline from the usual 1% to say 0.75% or even more. That may not seem like much but it is a 25% slower rate and, if you start when you are relatively young, the benefit will grow.

Of course, you can do the opposite and actually speed up the decline with non-attention to the 7 keys. But it is never too late to get started no matter what your age today. Do it now.

Stephen C Schimpff, MD, MACP, is a quasi-retired internist, professor of medicine and public policy, former CEO of the University of Maryland Medical Center and author most recently of Longevity Decoded – The 7 Keys to Healthy Aging. To learn more, go to: medicalmegatrends.com.