

# Longevity Made Simple

**HOW TO ADD**  

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**20 GOOD YEARS**  

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**TO YOUR LIFE**  

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Lessons from  
Decades of Research

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WILLIAMS CLARK PUBLISHING, LLC

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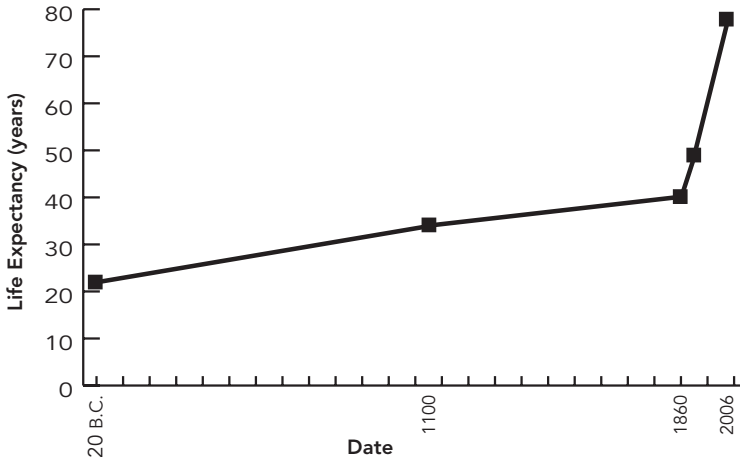
# A Great Time to Live a Long Life

How long do you want to live? If you are reading this book, you probably want to live as long and healthy a life as possible. Well, you are in luck. Today, we live in a unique time in human history. People are living longer than they ever have before.

Back when Julius Caesar ruled the Roman Empire, in the first century B.C., the average human life span was twenty-two years. That's a pretty grim number. Imagine living only twenty-two years! However, during the next two thousand years, the average life span slowly crept up. By 1900 the average human could expect to live to the ripe old age of forty-seven.

The main causes of death between Caesar's time and the early nineteenth hundreds were infections. For example, if you look at the leading causes of death in 1860, eight of the top ten killers were infectious diseases: tuberculosis, diarrhea, cholera, pneumonia, diphtheria, dysentery, scarlet fever, and nephritis. Infantile convulsions and infantile stroke were the only noninfectious diseases among the

### Life Expectancy Since Julius Caesar



Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Lydia Bronte, *The Longevity Factor*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1993; Human Mortality Database, University of California, Berkeley (USA), and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany).

top ten killers, accounting for 9 percent of deaths. So, for nearly two thousand years, 91 percent of the population died of infections.

Then, in 1928, a Scottish scientist named Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin. This groundbreaking discovery ushered in the age of antibiotics, which changed everything. Bacterial infections were essentially eliminated as a major cause of death, and today they no longer have a significant effect on the longevity of our population. Rather than losing 91 percent of our population to infections, only 3 to 4 percent of people in the developed world die from bacterial infections.

That, in turn, has dramatically increased our longevity. Between 1900 and 2000, the average life span in the United States jumped thirty years, from forty-seven to almost seventy-eight. We have never lived longer. Why, then, write a book on longevity? Because we can tell you how to live even longer *and* better.

## DO YOU WANT TO LIVE TO 100?

The average life span for a person born in America today is seventy-eight years. This number may sound good, but it's only an average, which means that many people do not make it to this age. When you take a closer look at the current statistics, the news is, indeed, more sobering. One-third of the American public dies before age sixty-five. Only half of us make it to the age of seventy-eight. In addition, many people who do live this long are ill, suffering, or disabled by chronic disease.

When we ask our patients if they want to live to 100, most of them say, "No way!" They say this because they envision their final years as dreadful ones dominated by illness, disability, and frailty. What our patients tell us they do want is quality. They want to remain healthy and active for as long as possible.

It just so happens that what gives us quality also gives us quantity. So, in our quest for greater longevity, we can also expect to enjoy better quality of life. Maybe living to 100 wouldn't be so bad after all.

## LIFE WITHOUT DISEASE: UTOPIA OR REALITY?

Have you ever wondered how long you could live if you had a life without disease? Well, Dr. William Schwartz, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Southern California who studies the human genome, addressed that question in his book *Life without Disease: The Pursuit of Medical Utopia*. Dr. Schwartz believes that scientists are going to find the longevity gene in our lifetime. Once that is achieved, he also believes we will be able to double our life span and live nearly 150 years. While we are not so sure that scientists will discover a longevity gene anytime soon, there is ample evidence that we already have the tools to live longer, healthier lives.

## **The Real Number-One Killer—Artery Disease**

In this book, we treat heart disease and stroke as different diseases, in part because the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention classify them as independent causes of death. But, in reality, they are similar diseases; they both result from problems in the arteries that disrupt the supply of oxygenated blood to your heart and brain. (See “It’s really about the arteries” on page 12, to learn how arteries become blocked.)

So, in essence, heart disease and stroke are really artery diseases. Physicians group all problems of blood supply under a single name: cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease includes not only stroke and coronary artery disease, but also high blood pressure, heart failure, and a few other circulatory diseases as well.

Artery disease, or bad blood supply, is the real number-one killer in America. According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease was the underlying cause in 37.3 percent of all deaths in 2003, or one in 2.7 deaths. More alarming, cardiovascular disease was a contributing cause of death in 58 percent of all deaths.

As the famed nutrition and cholesterol expert Scott Grundy, MD, PhD, once wrote—“you are as old as your arteries.” If your arteries are stiff and clogged with cholesterol, then you are not likely to live long. On the other hand, if your arteries are resilient and free of cholesterol plaques, you are likely to enjoy many more years of life no matter how many years you have already lived on this planet. So, remember, if you want to live a long life, treat your arteries well.

Dr. Thomas Perls, a researcher at Boston University, is the head of the New England Centenarian Study. He has extensively interviewed people who lived to 100 in order to understand the factors that contribute to longevity. Dr. Perls believes that we are genetically capable of living to at least eighty-five, but that lifestyle choices we make can

alter this number drastically in either direction. We wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Perls. And that is the crux of this book. We believe that choices you make today about your lifestyle, about the medications you take, and about the screening tests you get can extend your life twenty to twenty-five years, or even more.

Why do we think this? First, let us remember what has happened during the past century. With the advent of antibiotics and the widespread use of vaccines, infectious diseases have almost been eliminated as major killers in the developed world. (Infectious diseases do remain a leading cause of death in the developing world, however, because of poor sanitation and limited access to medications.) As a result, the average life span has increased by thirty years, or more than 60 percent.

So, if you want to add another twenty to thirty years to your life, you need to understand, treat, and prevent the diseases that cause most of the deaths today. What kills most people in the developed world today? Read on.

## TOP TEN CAUSES OF DEATH

*Death is not popular, it is not good for the complexion,  
and it leaves you with too much time on your hands.*

—GEORGE BURNS, 1896–1996

Do you have any idea how many diseases there are? In our office we have a big, thick book called the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, Tenth Revision, or *ICD-10*, which is a catalog of known diseases. When we see patients, we have to code their disorders using this book. It contains codes for more than 100,000 diseases. However, nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population dies from just three causes: heart disease, cancer, and stroke.

**Top Ten Causes of Death in the United States, 2003**

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Cause</i>	<i>Percentage of Deaths</i>	<i>Number of Deaths</i>
1	Heart disease	28	685,000
2	Cancer	23	557,000
3	Stroke	6	158,000
4	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)	5	126,000
5	Accidents	4	109,000
6	Diabetes mellitus	3	74,000
7	Influenza/pneumonia	3	65,000
8	Alzheimer's disease	3	63,000
9	Kidney disease	2	42,000
10	Septicemia	1	34,000
	<b>Total of all 10 causes</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>1,913,000</b>

*Source:* U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "National Vital Statistics Reports," 54, no. 13 (April 19, 2006).

Twenty-eight percent of us die from heart disease. Twenty-three percent die from cancer. Stroke accounts for another 6 percent of deaths in the United States.

The fourth leading cause of death is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, almost always due to smoking tobacco, which kills 5 percent of us. Four percent will die from accidents, and 3 percent will die from complications due to diabetes mellitus. That number, however, downplays the significance of diabetes because 65 to 75 percent of diabetics die from a vascular problem such as heart disease or stroke. Three percent die from the infectious diseases flu and pneumonia. Another 3 percent die from Alzheimer's disease, and 2 percent from kidney disease. Rounding out the top ten causes of death in America is septicemia, which is the clinical name for blood poisoning, an infection that kills 1 percent of us.

The top ten causes account for almost 80 percent of all deaths in

the United States. And not one of the diseases beyond the top ten accounts for even 1 percent of deaths. So, to live a long and healthy life, the odds suggest we needn't worry much about the vast majority of 100,000 diseases listed in the *ICD-10*. Instead, we should focus on preventing and treating just ten of them.

## WHAT DETERMINES LONGEVITY?

Can we find a modern-day cure, comparable to antibiotics, for today's top ten killers? Many people think not. They believe that their time on this earth is predestined by two immutable factors: family history and genetics.

We disagree. Family history and genetics do play a role in your longevity, but not as much as most people think. Lifestyle choices you make—diet, exercise, medications, and screening tests—can reduce the impact of those factors and greatly increase your longevity. The INTERHEART study, involving 29,000 patients from 52 countries, pointed out that lifestyle risk factors predict 90–94 percent of all heart disease. Genetics, therefore, contributes 10 percent or less of your risk of heart disease.

Many people believe that if you have cancer in your family history and in your genes, there is nothing you can do about it. But careful study has shown that much of the time this is not the case. In 1981 a landmark study published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* concluded that diet plays a role in most cancers, contributing to as much as 90 percent of all stomach and colon cancer cases. Tobacco accounts for more than 90 percent of all lung cancers. So it is largely the choices that you make—your diet and tobacco use—that help determine whether you get cancer.

This is not to say that family history and genetics play no role in cancer, or that cancer does not sometimes seem to strike at random. We

can't completely control the diseases we get, but we can dramatically alter the odds in our favor. And it is not only cancer and heart disease we're talking about. As we will discuss later in this book, the chances that you will suffer a stroke, develop diabetes, or die of any of the other leading causes of death can be dramatically altered by choices you make about diet, exercise, medication, and medical screening.

## **YOU CHOOSE**

That is why we wrote this book: to help you make the choices that will help you live a long and healthy life. What are those choices? And how do you make them? Fortunately, over the past thirty to forty years, thousands of researchers in the United States and around the world have been studying which diseases kill us, what causes them, and how to prevent them.

We have studied that research—not just the report that was published last week or last month, but also studies from the past decades that have withstood the test of time, sound and consistent research that is based on lengthy clinical trials involving thousands of people. We have also learned from our patients what they have done to improve their lives and to lower their risks of dying from the most common deadly diseases.

Based on what we have learned, we have come up with simple, effective, research-based guidelines to increase the length and quality of your life.

## **YOUR RISK PROFILE**

We have already identified the top ten killers in America today. In Chapter 2 we tell you more about those killers and the risk factors

that most commonly contribute to them, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and lack of exercise. In Chapter 3 we help you develop your own personal risk profile, the combination of risk factors that most threaten your health and longevity. Your risk profile will help you develop your own unique longevity plan, one that addresses your most important risk factors and is most likely to increase your life span. Chapters 4 through 9 outline simple, effective steps you can take to control those risk factors.

So, after identifying and reducing your personal risks, the next best thing you can do to prevent disease is to detect it before it spreads. In Chapter 10 we recommend a host of screening tests that will help you not only identify and monitor risk factors but also detect the earliest signs of disease so that you can take action to treat it or to prevent its progression. In Chapter 11, we will put it all together with ten essential tips that can add twenty quality years to your life.

## **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

The next step is yours. We can provide you with information and guidance. But, in the end, your health is up to you. You decide what you put in your mouth, what you do with your body, or what screening tests you get. What we are telling you here is that those choices make a real difference. The right choices can add years to your life, while the wrong ones can not only take away years, but also make those final years low quality ones filled with disease and disability.

So, we urge you to be aggressive about your health. Learn your personal risk factors, take the necessary steps to control them, and make plans for a longer, healthier, and happier life.