

COMPASS

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SLOWING the CLOCK

Your **REAL AGE** and how you can lower it

by chryss cada

It could be the difference between seeing your daughter graduate from high school and being at her wedding, between just meeting your grandchildren and watching them grow up or between celebrating your 40th and 50th wedding anniversary.

Studies consistently show you can add a decade or more onto your life by following a healthy lifestyle. The latest, from the University of Oslo, followed people for 20 years and found that those who didn't smoke, controlled their drinking, ate three or more fruits and veggies a day and had more than two hours of exercise a week tacked 12 full years to the end of their life.

What's better, slowing the clock doesn't require an elaborate trek to find the fountain of youth, just some tweaking of daily habits and choices.

"Even a relatively small lifestyle change — reducing calories by as little as 100 calories a day, doing 30 minutes of brisk exercise five days a week or losing 10 percent of your body weight — can greatly reduce your risk of chronic disease if sustained over time," says Bruce Cooper, medical director for the Health District of Northern Larimer County.

Cooper also acknowledges how difficult changing habits can be.

"Most people know the general guidelines, the importance of physical activity, what's good and bad in terms of diet — and everyone knows smoking is bad for your health," he says. "Awareness isn't so much the issue as overcoming the many barriers to a healthy lifestyle. The good news is, it's never too late to start."

Starting is the problem for most people. The easiest points to earn on the life expectancy predictors is whether or not you wear your seat belt. So buckle up (if you don't already), and consider the following to stretch out the road in front of you.

Nutrition

"We live in what is basically a toxic food environment," Cooper says. "There is calorie-rich, nutrition-poor food at every turn."

Adrienne LeBailly, Larimer County director of public health, agrees that it's difficult to avoid unhealthy food choices.

"Our society puts the burden on the individual to make decisions about food without giving them all of the information," LeBailly says. "Everything is supersized and full of sodium and fat, so people start to think those foods are the norm."

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In public health since 1981, LeBailly has seen a shift in the primary health concern.

“In 2008 the national obesity rate surpassed the number of people smoking,” she says. “Obviously both things are bad for you and to be avoided, but we’re seeing a shift in what people need to be educated about.”

There are a few simple ways to greatly improve the nutrition you get from food.

“Eat more fruits and veggies for the antioxidants and phytochemicals [chemicals that may affect health but are not yet established as essential nutrients] they naturally contain,” says Shirley Perryman, a registered dietitian and extension specialist at Colorado State University.

Perryman also suggests choosing fewer processed foods with added sugar.

“Sugar adds calories without the benefit of other nutrients,” Perryman says. “Remember that sugar can show up in many forms on ingredient labels — honey and high-fructose corn syrup are examples.”

Perryman also suggests lowering your sodium intake and increasing the number of high-fiber foods in your diet.

“Read labels to determine if processed foods, such as bread and cereals, are high in ‘whole’ wheat or oats, for example,” she says.

Exercise

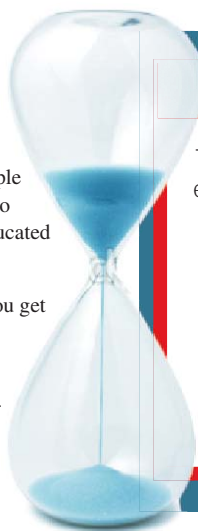
“For a lot of people, it’s not just quantity of life but quality,” says Ryan Conover, fitness director for Miramont Lifestyle Fitness, which has four clubs in northern Colorado. “You can live to be 80, but if you have heart failure at 65 and those last 15 years are miserable, quantity of life is not what you’re after. At the core, fitness is about quality of life.”

Miramont has a “body age” assessment for strength, cardiovascular fitness, body fat percentage and flexibility, to tell you the true age of your body and how to lower it. As an example, one 34-year-old man had a “body age” of 28 because of his high level of fitness.

“It would be obtainable for him to have a body age as low as 23,” Conover says. “Exercise and diet can’t stop aging, but they can certainly slow it.”

Fitness professionals suggest looking at exercise as a way to make your life better, not just extend it.

“If you find something you love, you’re more likely to stick with it and less likely to stray from it,” Conover says.



How long do you have?

To learn more about the true age of your body and/or your life expectancy, visit one of the following websites. If nothing else, it will be a great reminder of all the healthy habits that can enhance day-to-day living for you and your family.

gosset.wharton.upenn.edu/mortality

www.northwesternmutual.com/learning-center/the-longevity-game.aspx

www.realage.com

One way to make exercise fun is to not do it alone.

“People exercise because they get something out of it, and if the health benefits aren’t enough to motivate someone, maybe companionship could be,” LeBailly says. “We’re evolved social animals, and friendships are good for our brains. Walking or playing tennis with a friend benefits your mind *and* your body.”

Smoking

That smoking takes years off your life isn’t earthshaking news for anyone — especially smokers.

“We’ve been hearing it since we were kids, smoking is bad for us,” says Bear Gebhardt, a Health District smoking cessation counselor who has written two books on quitting smoking. “Well, a lot of people figure everybody is going to die sometime, so they might as well enjoy themselves while they’re alive.”

In his innovative approach to helping people quit, Gebhardt looks at why people started smoking in the first place.

“For a lot of people, smoking is how they access joy, and nobody wants to live a life without joy,” he says. “If there’s no joy in life, then people are more than willing to cut it short.”

The key is to relearn enjoyment in life through other means.

“Our culture tells us joy is something you have to go out and get, when actually it’s in all of us,” Gebhardt says.

“We find ways to access that joy that helps us live longer, more enjoyable lives.”



Top 10 (tips) to add 10 (years) to your life

1. Find a type of physical activity you enjoy.
2. Exercise aerobically for at least 30 minutes five days a week.
3. If overweight, lose 5 to 10 percent of your body weight.
4. Quit smoking.
5. Add an extra fruit or veggie every day.
6. Reduce stress.
7. Limit intake of processed foods and drinks with added sugars and salt.
8. Take time for friendships.
9. Eat foods high in fiber.
10. Find what brings you joy, and do it.

