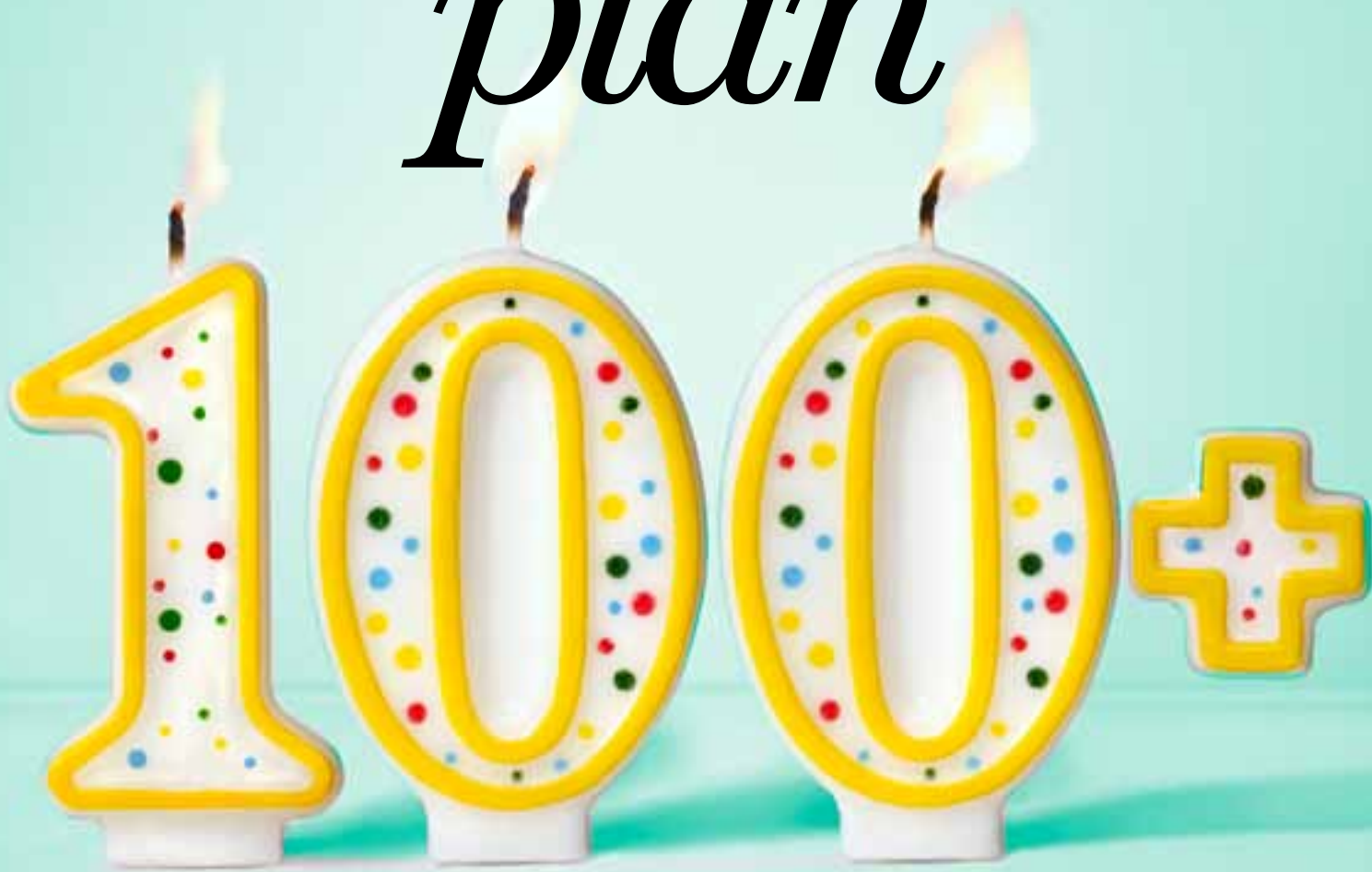


Your LONG LIFE plan



A long and healthy life can be yours! All you need to do is adopt these proven strategies from the world's leading longevity experts to have many happy returns.

You might be surprised to find out that your genetics only account for about 30 per cent of how healthy you are. The other 70 per cent is up to us, and how we go about our daily lives can mean the difference between an early death and living to a ripe old age.

While diet and exercise are important, there are lots of less obvious things you can do that are crucial for securing a membership to the 100-year-old club. We went to the world's leading experts on longevity to find out what those things are and what we should start doing today.

* *Eat a rainbow*

Maxing your vegie intake is about more than just fitting into a pair of skinny-leg jeans. Dan Buettner, author of *The Blue Zone: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest*, says eating a plant-based diet with lots of different coloured vegetables is one of the key reasons the Okinawa community in Japan has five times the number of centenarians as America.

As well as providing essential nutrients, experts believe a fruit-and-veg-packed diet can increase your consumption of antioxidants, which counteract internal inflammation. "Inflammation has been implicated in cardiovascular disease and many types of cancer, as well as ageing" says Professor Gordon Lynch, head of physiology at the University of Melbourne.

WHAT'S YOUR IKIGAI?

The healthy and long-living Japanese Okinawans have a word, ikigai, which translates to 'the reason for being'. "For one 102-year-old karate master, his ikigai was carrying forth this martial art," Buettner says. "For another 102-year-old woman, her ikigai was simply her great-great-granddaughter. These people know their sense of purpose, and they activate it in their life."

Studies show 91 per cent of Australian adults aren't eating the recommended five serves of veggies a day, and this could be jeopardising your chance for a long life. "Eating different coloured vegetables gives you the best mix of antioxidants and nutrients," says accredited practicing dietician Kellie Bilinski. "For example, tomatoes are rich in the nutrient lycopene, whereas carrots provide a rich source of pro-vitamin A, via beta-carotene. Also, choosing in-season vegetables means they're typically fresher and more nutritious than those out of season." **Live longer** Check off your five serves of in-season veggies a day.

* *Make movement easy*

You don't have to run 10km a day or smash the weights to live a long life – the key lies in consistency of movement. Buettner – who studied five communities with the longest disability-free life expectancy in the world – found that 'incidental' exercise, such as gardening and housework, was crucial for longevity. "They all set up their lives so they're constantly nudged into physical activity," he says. "Every trip to the store or to church or to their friend's house, occasions a walk... and it burns calories just as much as going on a treadmill."

Regular exercise is proven to lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, and Professor Lynch says it's also important for helping us maintain independence as we age. "If we can make our muscles stronger and resistant to fatigue, the activities we take for granted now – like climbing stairs and maintaining personal hygiene – won't become a chore later on," he explains.

Exercise is also crucial for keeping our brains active, especially in areas concerned with learning and memory. "It's associated with reduced depression and anxiety, better cognitive performance and lower risk of neuro-degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's," says Dr Lynn Ward, from the School of Psychology at the University of Adelaide. >

Live longer Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise or movement every day.

"Eating different coloured vegetables gives you the best mix of antioxidants and nutrients."



“Keeping our bodies active and watching what we eat have important benefits for mental health.”

*** Fill up on fish**

The importance of omega-3 fatty acids comes up time and time and again in longevity studies. Found in oily fish, these heart-boosting fats work by improving blood vessel elasticity, thinning the blood and aiding the rhythm of the heartbeat. “Lots of studies have shown the benefit of increasing omega-3s in our diet to try and slow the rate of cardiovascular disease and many types of cancers,” Professor Lynch says. By improving blood flow, the brain also gets a hit of fresh oxygenated blood, which may keep dementia at bay. “Keeping our bodies active, watching what we eat, cutting down on saturated fats and upping our omega-3 intake have important benefits for mental health,” Dr Lynch says.

Live longer Eat fish three times a week.

*** Strive high**

While being relaxed and carefree is often touted as the holy grail of health, US researchers found that ambition goes hand-in-hand with living longer. “Our studies revealed hard work and accomplishment to be a strong predictor of a long life,” wrote Howard Friedman and Leslie Martin in their book *The Longevity Project*, which analysed data from the most extensive longevity study ever done. “Those who were the most successful were the ones least likely to die at any given age,” Friedman and Martin reported.

But don’t stress if you’re not doing your dream job right now. Start looking for a more purposeful life today. “The impact of healthy behaviours tends to be cumulative, so although starting earlier in life is better, it’s never too late,” Dr Ward says.

Live longer Set some goals and go for it.

*** Be a social butterfly**

Want to know the simplest health remedy that will save you the equivalent of about 15 cigarettes a day or a lifetime of alcoholism? Have great friends. It turns out, scheduling coffee catch-ups with the girls actually helps decrease your odds of an early death by 50 per cent. “Good friendships provide a sense of belonging, meaning or purpose,” Dr Ward points out.

Researchers from Brigham Young University in the US analysed data from 300,000 people and found that low social interaction is twice as harmful as obesity. “When someone is connected to a group and feels responsible for other people, that sense of purpose and meaning translates to taking better care of themselves and taking fewer risks,” says study author Professor Julianne Holt-Lunstad.

And if those in your social network are healthy, you’ll do even better. A study conducted by Harvard University found that our chances of obesity increase by 57 per cent if one of our friends becomes obese. On the flipside, they believe positive collective health habits could have a similar effect.

Live longer Reconnect with good friends and make plans to catch up.

GOLDEN GIRL

Kath Raper, 101, from Mosman NSW, received letters from the Queen, the Governor General, the Mayor of Mosman, the Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition and the Pope when she hit the century. Her secret: “Just take it one day at a time.”

*** Look on the bright side**

If you’re a ‘glass-half-full’ kind of person, you’re putting yourself in good stead for a long life, with most longevity studies revealing a positive attitude is key. “[Most 100-year-olds] are very adaptable and flexible,” says Dr Charlene Levitan, the study coordinator of the Sydney Centenarian Study at the University of New South Wales. “It’s not that these people have avoided stress or traumatic circumstances – many of them have lived through two world wars and the Holocaust – but it’s the way they psychologically dealt with the circumstances. Rather than becoming stressed about a situation, the centenarians would think about positive outcomes and then correlate that with positive behaviours.”

Live longer: Focus on the good.

*** Chill out**

Stress not only saps the fun out of life, but it speeds up cellular ageing by eroding the tiny caps on the end of our chromosomes, called telomeres. “As you get older, they naturally shorten, and they shorten more quickly in people who are stressed and people who are sedentary,” Dr Ward explains. “As a result, cells are unable to reproduce very well and eventually become diseased and die.”

Dr Levitan encourages anyone who gets bogged down by stress to prioritise activities that help them feel good. “For some people, that might mean engaging in physical activity or taking up a new hobby. Find healthy ways to reduce your stress levels and increase your enjoyment and positive outlook on life,” she says. ■

Live longer Manage your stress levels. Try our ‘stress-less’ techniques (right).



BACK OFF THE BOOZE

While studies show a daily glass of red wine could have some anti-ageing properties, the longevity experts all agree that when it comes to alcohol – less is best. “Those who survive to 95 years and older drink less than your average Australians,” Dr Levitan says.

STRESS LESS

Part of managing your stress levels is having good coping techniques. So swap old habits for these healthy strategies.



I pour myself a glass of wine

INSTEAD Sink into a bath with some salts in it, and down a Virgin Bloody Mary with plenty of spice. You’ll soon feel warm and fuzzy.

I talk it out on the phone

INSTEAD Invite your friend to go for a walk with you, or meet them in the park to watch the sunset and talk it out.

I eat whatever is available

INSTEAD Go and buy fresh ingredients for a delicious, healthy meal – something you’d normally only make for a special guest. Crank up the music and cook up a treat!

I zone out in front of the TV

INSTEAD Lie down and listen to a nice guided meditation; there are plenty available on YouTube and iTunes that will take you to your happy place.