

## Chapter 7: Take Care – Additional Material

---

In *Live Long & Prosper!*, I list 15 health and prevention practices that significantly reduce the odds of incurring high medical expenses in our later years. This is our first line of defense.

Here's the interesting thing about these practices. A lot of research indicates that they can also help us live long, vigorous lives, well into our 80's, 90's and beyond. So I'm planning my financial strategies with this possibility in mind. However, even if we don't live to 100, it's worth it to adopt these lifestyle practices just to address our fear of high medical bills during our *rest-of-life*.

### **So what should we do?**

I've done a fair amount of dabbling, reading, and research on self-care over the last several years, including taking many health risk assessments and paying attention to the suggested action steps. Based on my experience, here I suggest 15 practices of self-care. I don't pretend that these are the 'final words' on the subject, but for me, they're a good place to start. I intend to continue learning and trying new practices for the rest of my life, and I encourage you to do the same. We don't need to be doctors to take care of ourselves. With a little knowledge and experience, we can trust our own judgment about the practices that work best for us, and have informed conversations with our team of health care professionals to determine a strategy for optimizing our health.

So here I briefly list the 15 practices; I'll go into more detail in the pages that follow. As you can see, it doesn't take a genius to understand them! The first four are the most important, meaning that many studies consistently identify them as the lifestyle choices that have the most impact on our health. The rest are not listed in order of importance.

1. Adopt a nutrition regimen that is appropriate for our own circumstances. This includes a healthy diet, taking supplements, and most importantly, eating the right *amount* of food.
2. Get regular exercise.
3. Don't smoke.
4. Don't abuse alcohol and other substances.
5. Get enough sleep (this can be influenced by our work lifestyles).
6. Drink enough water.
7. Get regular checkups, including the appropriate diagnostic tests for diseases that are common in older people, or that are important given our genetic disposition.
8. As much as possible, utilize our body's natural ability to diagnose and heal. This includes being aware of circumstances when our bodies will heal themselves naturally, without intrusive and sometimes harmful interventions. It also means listening to and respecting the signals our body sends to us that tell us something might be wrong.
9. Create a supportive health care team. Seek health care professionals who advocate self-healing as the first line of defense. And when we get sick, they will help us select among conventional and alternative medicine, whichever is most appropriate for the circumstances.
10. Be aware of and avoid toxins in our environment.

11. Have a daily practice to calm our minds and reduce harmful stress, such as meditation, prayer, yoga, tai chi, or exercise.
12. Find ways to identify and work out life's stresses and problems, including therapy, employee assistance programs (EAPs), group discussions, church resources, friends, or spiritual advisors.
13. Periodically take healing days, where we get body care treatments to help us stay in optimum health. Examples include massages, Jacuzzi or steam room visits, healing treatments such as acupuncture, reiki, or healing touch.
14. Have purpose in life – strong reasons for getting up in the morning. Often this means connection to family and community, or helping meet social needs.
15. Create a supportive lifestyle, which includes a healthy work/life balance and basic economic security. Have at least *just enough* to meet basic living needs.

Collectively, how much money would our nation save if we adopted these principles? As Carl Sagan would say, 'billions and billions!' And we would be a lot more healthy and happy!

Now let's go into more detail on these 15 principles.

### **1. Have a healthy diet, and pay attention to proper nutrition**

Nobody really argues anymore that our diet is a key part of maintaining optimum health. This has been verified by many recent scientific studies, but many cultures have known this for centuries! There are lots of books and resources on this subject, so I don't need to duplicate

them here. I'll just give you an overview of the most important aspects, and then identify resources that can help you with additional information.

I am focusing on three key action steps:

- Eating the right amount of food.
- Eating the right kinds of foods.
- Enhancing my diet with nutritional supplements.

When I first started paying attention to diet and nutrition, I found an overwhelming and bewildering array of diets and eating regimens. So I just picked one and started out. It was wrong for me – I didn't lose weight, I had less energy, and it made my eating experience miserable. I continued experimenting and finally found an eating regimen that works for me. So my advice is: don't let this cornucopia of advice paralyze you – in the end, they should all focus on eating the right amount and right kinds of foods that are appropriate for our own circumstances. Everybody has their own unique body metabolism and physical and emotional makeup. It's only natural that a specific diet might not work for me, but work very well for someone I know. The best way to proceed is to read about different diets, see if they make sense, and try them out for awhile. There's no rush – we've got decades to figure it out!

Now, let's go into more detail on each point.

**It's no secret that we eat too much.**

Our nation is just too efficient at putting tasty food in front of our faces, and we can't resist. One study classifies one out of five Americans as obese and two out of five as overweight. Add

these together, and well over half of Americans have a weight problem that threatens their health.

The body mass index (BMI) provides us with guidance on the ideal weight, given our height. A healthy BMI ranges from 20 to 25; 26 to 29 is considered overweight. According to one source, a BMI of 30 or greater increases the chances of death by any cause from 50% to 150%.

If you want to learn more about the body mass index and do your own calculation, just do an online search on 'body mass index' and you'll find lots of BMI calculators. I like the versions at:

- [www.weightwatchers.com](http://www.weightwatchers.com)
- [www.caloriecontrol.org](http://www.caloriecontrol.org)

The BMI is not perfect. For example, it produces misleading results for athletes who are very healthy, have no body fat, but weigh much more than the amounts suggested by the BMI. These are the people who indeed have dense muscles! Dr. Roy Walford, M.D., was a professor of pathology at UCLA and author of *The Anti-Aging Plan (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995)*. He recommends a more accurate method of determining our optimal weight, called the density method. Our doctor would need to arrange this.

Both Dr. Walford and Dr. James Williams, author of *Prolonging Health: Mastering the 10 Factors of Longevity* (Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2003) also advocate caloric restriction as an important means for prolonging health, vitality and longevity. Their books describe practical methods for doing this, and I discuss their methods further in *Live Long & Prosper!*

So how can we discipline ourselves to eat less, without making our lives miserable, and while still enjoying the eating experience? Here are some tips that have worked for me.

- Eat just one helping of food. At home, if the food was really good, I would eat two helpings and then pile on dessert. Duh! Now I eat just one helping and try to avoid dessert. If I eat at a restaurant and am served a huge amount of food (which happens often), right away I'll set aside half for a doggie bag. When it comes to pleasure, it's the first several bites that provide the most enjoyment. Eventually my taste buds become jaded, my enjoyment fades, and I'm just stuffing myself needlessly.
  
- Take enough time to eat and chew my food. When I was a kid, my fuddy old Uncle Lawrence would lecture me on the benefits of thoroughly 'masticating' my food. At the time, I thought he was a crazy old coot. But now I've found this really works! (Actually, I'm becoming a crazy old coot, but who cares!). Studies have verified that from the time I start eating, it takes twenty to thirty minutes for my brain to send signals that I'm full. If I wolf down my food in five to fifteen minutes, I don't feel full and keep stuffing myself. Then, later the signals kick in and, by golly, I'm stuffed. Also a thorough chewing produces saliva and juices that help with digestion and moving food through my system. Finally, taking a break between courses also helps with allowing enough time for my body to realize that it's had enough. I'll wait at least 10 minutes between courses, or before starting dessert – and often I find I'm full and don't want any more food.
  
- Periodically, I'll take a day-long fast, and will only drink water and fruit juices. This helps clean out my system and cuts down on my food intake. There's a whole science around fasting, and many health professionals advocate fasts much longer than one day. If you want to learn more, two resources are:
  - *Fasting and Eating for Health* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), by Joel Fuhrman, M.D., makes a compelling case for the benefits of periodic fasting. Not only do we lose weight, but we detoxify the body as well.

- The web site [www.fasting.com](http://www.fasting.com) cites research and has many testimonials on the benefits of fasting. The web site also offers online supervised fasting programs.

There is some controversy on the health benefits of long fasts, so I intend to go easy in my explorations, and learn more before trying long fasts. However, short one-day fasts aren't a problem, and have been practiced by humans intentionally and unintentionally since the dawn of mankind.

- Finally, I've become intrigued with the idea of becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. What do I mean by this? For most of us, hunger pangs are uncomfortable. The moment we feel hungry, we think we must eat and reach for food - overeating is a habit. I'm finding ways to postpone eating beyond the first hunger pangs. I'll live with them for awhile. I've found that when I do this, after awhile the hunger pangs don't bother me as much, particularly if I'm busy doing something interesting. This has been one beneficial result of a few day-long food fasts – they help break my habit of automatically reaching for food the moment I feel hunger pangs. Once I set my intent to drink only water and fruit juice for the day, I didn't long for food when I felt hungry. The hunger pangs were just part of my day that I accepted, and surprisingly they gave me additional energy. For me, this is an interesting topic for future exploration.

**It's also no secret that we eat the wrong kinds of food.**

I won't be revealing state secrets if I tell you that Americans eat too much meat, too much processed foods, too much fat, and not enough fresh fruits and vegetables.

I'll cite two interesting sources.

1. The National Cancer Institute co-sponsors a program called the *5 A Day for Better Health Program*. The message is quite simple and powerful - eat five to nine colorful fresh fruits and vegetables per day for better health. They emphasize a variety of color, because that happens to deliver the necessary variety of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients that we need for optimum health. For more information, including references to research, recipes, and related links, see [www.5aday.gov](http://www.5aday.gov).
  
2. We've all heard about the USDA's Food Guide Pyramid – the federal government's official recommendations for daily diet. These guidelines have come under fire lately by many researchers, as longitudinal studies are emerging on the long-term effects of diet on sustained health. For example, in late 2002, the Harvard School of Public Health released a study which measured the effect of diet on over 100,000 men and women over a 15 year period. They developed an alternative recommended diet, and found that people who followed this alternative diet reduced the risks of chronic disease by twice as much as people who followed the official government's diet. The alternative daily diet recommended by Harvard includes:
  - 5 servings of vegetables
  
  - 4 servings of fruit
  
  - 1 serving of nuts and tofu
  
  - Eat white meat (fish or poultry) four times as often as red meat (beef, pork, lamb, and processed meats)
  
  - 3 to 6 servings of whole grains, such as dark breads and high fiber cereals.

The study is published in the December, 2002 issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

All of the resources mentioned previously on longevity emphasize the importance of the *right* kinds of foods, and are consistent with the above summaries. For example, Dr. Walford calls his eating regimen the CRON diet, which stands for calorie restriction with optimal nutrition. His theories make a lot of sense to me. He has identified the nutrients that our bodies need to be healthy, and then developed the diet that will give us these nutrients *with the minimum number of calories*. He has conducted extensive research with rodents and primates, and has demonstrated conclusively that the CRON diet dramatically extends their lifespans and reduces incidence of the major killer diseases that inflict humans. He has conducted similar studies with humans, but we won't know the results for sure until his subjects live until 100 and beyond. I have been sufficiently convinced by Dr. Walford's findings and strategies to begin introducing them into my lifestyle.

Dr. Walford makes the excellent point that if we simply reduce the number of calories we intake to lose weight, we might be cutting out vital nutrients, resulting in malnutrition and ultimately susceptibility to disease. So, we need to be very careful in selecting the foods that give us all these nutrients, and eat *just enough* of them. His books contain great recipes and menus to help us get started. Here's one bonus which I explore more in Chapter 18 on expenses – Dr. Walford's diet is also a lot less expensive than the typical American diet. So, not only do we save on medical bills, but we save a lot on food bills as well!

With respect to diets and eating regimens, here's where individual body makeup and metabolism can make a difference. Some people swear by a diet full of protein, some like carbohydrates, while others thrive on a vegetarian diet. I suggest that you try them out to see what works for you. In any case, whenever possible make it fresh. Overcooking and processing often strips out the needed vitamins, minerals and nutrients – and usually processed

food tastes worse and is more expensive than fresh food. It doesn't take a genius to figure this out which is better!

Another area I'm exploring is food combining, or food trophology. The main idea is that certain combinations of food at one meal are bad for us, because together they are very hard to digest. This causes toxins to accumulate in our digestive system, increasing our susceptibility to disease. It also contributes to weight gain. Here are just a few examples:

- Avoid combining protein and carbohydrates in the same meal. Better meal combinations are vegetables and protein, or vegetables and carbohydrates.
  
- Fruit travels faster through the digestive system, so eat it first before we eat denser foods, such as meats and carbohydrates, that travel more slowly through the system. If we eat fruits after these dense foods, the fruits race through our digestive system until they collide with the slower-moving foods, creating chaos and digestive problems.
  
- Eat meat as a condiment – don't make it the bulk of a meal.

These are meant just to give you an idea. If you're interested, the popular book *Fit for Life* (Warner Books, 1985), by Harvey and Marilyn Diamond, tells us the physiological reasons for paying attention to food combining, and how to do it. It also advocates eating plenty of raw fruits and vegetables, as well as eating 'live' food that hasn't been destroyed by processing or overcooking. I've been following this eating regimen for a few years, and it has helped me lose weight, reduce digestive disorders, and gain more energy. The Chinese have studied these subjects for centuries, for the same reasons. A book written for Westerners, *The Taoism of Health, Sex, and Longevity* (Simon & Schuster, 1989), by Daniel Reid, covers this subject in detail.

Here are a few other books that have helped me develop my own eating regimen:

- *Eating Well for Optimum Health* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), by Andrew Weil, M.D. This book has a good descriptions on the basics of nutrition, an overview on a health diet, and recipes to help us get started.
- *Vitality Foods for Health and Fitness* (Duncan Baird Publishers, 2002), by Pierre Jean Cousin and Kirsten Hartvig.
- *Food as Medicine: How to Use Diet, Vitamins, Juices, and Herbs for a Healthier, Happier and Longer Life* (Atria Books, 2003), by Darma Singh Khalsa, M.D.

### **Should I take supplements?**

For years, the medical profession downplayed the role of supplementing our diets with vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Medical experts claimed that we should get everything we needed from a balanced diet, and that our body flushes out excess vitamins. One doctor told me that all I got from taking vitamins was expensive urine!

Gradually the medical profession came around to accepting the role of supplements, for a number of reasons.

- Many people aren't getting a balanced diet.
- Processed foods often don't contain the nutrients and vitamins that we need.
- Pollution and toxins in the environment can stress our systems such that we need additional fortification.

- Finally, supplements can help us go beyond ‘not being sick,’ to optimizing our energy and vitality.

In 2002, the respected Journal of the American Medicine Association (JAMA) reversed a long-standing position, and endorsed nutritional supplements as an effective way to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis. Here are a few quotes from Drs. Robert Fletcher and Kathleen Fairfield, of Harvard University, who wrote the new guidelines published in the JAMA.

‘Even people who eat five daily servings of fruits and vegetables may not get enough of certain vitamins for optimum health.’

‘Because foods contain thousands of vitamin-like compounds – many not yet identified – that may be important for good health, vitamin supplements should not be a substitute for a wholesome diet.’

In the books mentioned previously on longevity, Drs. Walford, Williams and Khalsa all recommend nutritional supplements for promoting health and longevity. However, they emphasize that supplements should *complement* an effective diet and exercise regimen, which play a much greater role in our health than nutritional supplements.

So what types of supplements should we take? I’m taking supplements for vitamins A through E, a variety of minerals, and a few herbal supplements for conditions particular to my body and genetic disposition and stage in life. Two online sources for information on vitamins, and convenient ways to order them, are:

- [www.drweil.com](http://www.drweil.com)

- [www.drwhitaker.com](http://www.drwhitaker.com)

Your local health food store can also be a good source of information and supplements.

When I read a variety of resources on supplements, I found disagreement on the *amounts* that we should take. Some recommend just the Required Daily Allowances (RDAs) set by the Committee on Dietary Allowances by the National Academy of Sciences. Others recommend doses far beyond the RDAs. For me, the most sensible advice comes from Dr. Walford, who advocates that diet is far more important than supplements. Make some decisions on supplements and just move on, so we can focus our time and energy on our diet. Once again, I advocate starting your own investigation on the nutritional supplements that you need, and fine tuning your nutritional regimen as you learn more.

## 2. Exercise

By now, we all have heard that we need to exercise regularly to help prevent disease, extend our lifetimes and generally enjoy our later years. Several studies link regular exercise to reducing the odds of virtually all of the most expensive diseases to treat that I summarized in the last chapter, including heart disease and cancer. If we're seeking a fountain of youth, we need look no further than a regimen of regular exercise!

One good resource that I found was a web site with the National Institute of Health, [www.nihseniorhealth.com](http://www.nihseniorhealth.com). It advocates getting four types of exercise.

- **Strength.** This helps build muscle, increase metabolism, maintain bone density, prevent injuries and falls, prevent osteoporosis, which can be very debilitating, and keep weight and blood sugar in check. Common strength exercises are gentle and light weight lifting, calisthenics and swimming.

- **Balance.** Falls can cause serious injuries that are debilitating physically and financially. Good exercises for balance include tai chi, yoga, and simple walking.
- **Stretching.** This keeps our joints and muscles flexible, which reduces the odds of debilitating injuries and helps prevent arthritis, another common ailment for seniors. Yoga is one good practice which combines balance and stretching.
- **Endurance.** This is the familiar cardiovascular exercise – work for our hearts and lungs, which can help prevent heart disease and many other diseases. Many studies advocate exercising at least four times per week. Each session should last at 30 minutes, and up to 60 minute is preferable. While there are many ways to get cardiovascular exercise, the easiest is taking a 30 to 60 minute walk. We don't need to belong to a gym, get special equipment, or learn specialized skills. We can also get our 30 to 60 minutes with bicycling, and swimming is an excellent way to combine endurance with strength exercises. While four days per week is a minimum, every day is best!

This is just a summary – I urge you to visit this web site for more information. It describes specific exercises for each type listed above, along with safety tips.

I get the four types of exercise mentioned above with walking, swimming, martial arts, and my daily practice (see health practice #11 below). Here are a few more resources that friends have recommended.

- The book *Body for Life* (HarperCollins, 1999), by Bill Phillips, provides a good overview of strength exercises. This book goes beyond just strength exercises, and endorses a lifestyle that is consistent with many of the practices described in this book.

- Not many people are familiar with how to stretch properly, until they read the book *Stretching* (Shelter Publications, 2000), by Bob Anderson.

Here are a few last important points, courtesy of Dr. Walford. He cites research conducted with rodents which demonstrate a ‘use it or lose it’ effect. His subjects that exercised lived longer *average* lives and had less disease than the sedentary subjects. But, they didn’t extend their *maximum* lifespans – the CRON diet is the only thing that does that. According to Dr. Walford, diet is more important to our health and life extension than exercise. This is *not* an excuse to stop exercising. Instead, the point is to avoid the common fallacy of assuming that because we exercise, we don’t need to pay attention to our diet. There’s a real-life example of this fallacy in one of the life stories that is also posted on my web site.

### 3. Don’t Smoke.

What more can I say? We all know about the diseases caused by smoking, and there’s a thriving industry on helping people quit. I acknowledge that this is probably the most difficult lifestyle choice to change, since cigarettes are very addictive. Here’s some motivation as it relates to our later years and the themes in this book:

- Smoking reduces life expectancy for people over age 50 by five to ten years. And, the last few years will be a lot worse for smokers than nonsmokers.
- On average, smokers pay 50% more than nonsmokers on their medical bills. This money, together with the money spent on cigarettes, could be better spent enjoying life!

Let’s also put to rest another myth - it’s not too late! Various studies show that our body repairs our lungs after we quit smoking. Ten years after quitting, the lungs of a former smoker don’t

look very different from the lungs of someone who never smoked. We have much more than ten years of life left, so it's never too late to quit!

The health of people who never smoked is generally better than people who smoked for a long time and then quit, but in turn the quitters' health is generally much better than the people who smoke until they die. Ten years from now, would you rather have been smoke-free for these ten years, or would you rather have smoked for ten more years? Either way, the ten years will pass (or maybe they won't, if you keep smoking).

There's not much more I will say here, other than to urge you to find the motivation from within to make such an important change for the rest of your life.

#### **4. Don't Abuse Alcohol or Other Substances.**

I'm not talking about an occasional glass of wine or beer. In fact, many studies actually associate an occasional drink with reduced risk of heart attacks and certain cancers, and lowering blood pressure. Some studies focus on red wine as the best, containing antioxidants and other nutrients. If you don't like red wine, you can probably get the same benefits by eating red grapes or grape juice, and finding natural ways to relax, such as exercise, meditation, yoga, and tai chi.

The research shows that alcohol intake starts affecting our health and decreases our longevity with three to four drinks per episode, with more than two such episodes per week. It really begins hurting with five or more drinks per episode, with more than one such episode per month.

#### **5. Get enough sleep.**

Many Americans are sleep-deprived, often as a result of working too much or too hard. According to a 2002 poll conducted by the National Sleep Foundation, only one-third of Americans get the recommended eight hours of shut-eye on weeknights.

Sleep deprivation can shave years off our lives, according to studies by the National Sleep Foundation and Dr. Mary Dew of the University of Pittsburgh. Even in our later years, we still need seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Quality of sleep is also important, so we should make every effort to get restful sleep each night. I found some interesting articles on sleep in the Journal of Longevity, online at [www.journaloflongevity.com](http://www.journaloflongevity.com).

Drs Williams and Khalsa make the connection between sleep and longevity, and confirm these recommendations. Dr. Khalsa identifies lifelong stress as a significant contributor to the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Getting enough sleep, and the right kind of sleep, is an important way to manage our stress.

## **6. Drink enough water.**

Most Americans don't drink enough water. For this purpose, I don't count alcoholic drinks, sodas or milk as water, but natural fresh fruit juices and tea count. The consequences of not drinking enough water include:

- Decreased digestive efficiency and organ function
  
- Weight gain due to water retention (when the body doesn't get enough water, it tries to hang on to the water it gets)
  
- Headaches

- Increased toxicity in the body
- Long-term stress in our kidneys.

Dr. Williams goes into more detail on the benefits of hydrating our kidneys in his book *Prolonging Health* (Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2003).

A general rule of thumb for daily intake is to drink ½ ounce of water per pound of body weight if we're active, and 2/3 ounce per pound if we're athletic. For example, if I weigh 160 pounds, that's 80 ounces per day. This is 10 eight-ounce glasses per day if I'm not active, and 13 to 14 glasses if I'm active. These should be spread out throughout the day.

For more information, see [www.naturopoc.com](http://www.naturopoc.com).

## **7. Get regular checkups and screenings.**

After age 50, we should have at least biannual exams that might include the appropriate tests for blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, and various cancers including breast, cervical, colon, and prostate cancers. This is an example of writing our personal health owner's manual – given our circumstances and genetic disposition, it may be very important to obtain certain diagnostics or immunizations. This is a subject to discuss with your health care team (see the next point).

The web site [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov) contains good educational resources about the uses of diagnostics and screenings as part of our prevention lifestyle. This is the web site of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. This web site contains guides for screenings that are helpful for people age 50 and over. It also describes the mission of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which is 'an independent panel of experts in primary care and prevention that

systematically reviews the evidence of effectiveness and develops recommendations for clinical preventative services.’ The information we learn can form a good foundation for having informed conversations with our health care professionals.

I’m using the information on this web site, together with my health care team, to develop my own schedule of diagnostics tests that I should take periodically, for the rest of my life.

A word of caution – it’s been estimated that one-third of diagnostic tests aren’t necessary, and some carry risks. Yet another reason to be educated, and have informed discussions with our health care professionals.

#### **8. Use our body’s natural ability to diagnose and heal**

Our bodies contain an amazing capacity to heal themselves, and often we interfere with the process by taking unnecessary medicines and over-the-counter drugs, eating the wrong foods, or refusing to listen to our body’s signals. Self-healing is often more effective and much cheaper – what more could we want?

In addition, when something feels different and wrong, chances are good our body is sending us a signal that something is wrong. In this case, I’ll go to the doctor. I won’t ignore my body’s signals, or tough it out. If you want motivation on this point, see some of the life stories that are posted on my web site.

I’ve had one personal experience that has convinced me of the body’s power to heal. I was nearsighted, with my vision rated at 20-100. A few years ago, I got interested in natural healing of my vision, as I was too squeamish to resort to eye surgery. I use a combination of meditative and visioning techniques, vitamin supplements, and relearning how to see properly. My

eyesight is now 20-20! I used to spend \$500 per year on contacts, supplies, and checkups. No more!

For more information on using our natural ability to heal, see some of the books that I identify in *Live Long & Prosper!*

### 9. **Build a supportive health care team**

I'm building my own health care team - health care professionals who advocate prevention and self-healing as the first line of defense. When something goes wrong, they will help me select among the variety of conventional, alternative, and complementary medical treatments. The ideal general physician would be knowledgeable and informed on the use of all the practices mentioned in this chapter. However, that's a lot to ask in one person. I'll use conventionally-trained physicians for diagnosis, and for prescribing drugs or surgical interventions when absolutely necessary. However, I'll also seek the advice of nutritionists, physical fitness trainers, and Naturopathic doctors for prevention of disease and maintaining optimum health. In the process, I'll get a great education!

While researching this book, I learned about Naturopathic Medicine, and it has become an important part of my health strategy. I have visited a Naturopathic doctor who helped me put together an effective strategy for optimizing my health. I found some good information on the web site [www.naturopathic.org](http://www.naturopathic.org), and I encourage you to visit this web site. Here are some interesting quotes from this web site.

**'What is Naturopathic Medicine?** Founded upon a holistic philosophy, naturopathic medicine combines safe and effective traditional therapies with the most current advances in modern medicine. Naturopathic medicine is appropriate for the management of a broad range of health conditions affecting all people of all ages.

Naturopathic physicians (N.D.s) are the highest trained practitioners in the broadest scope of naturopathic medical modalities. In addition to the basic medical sciences and conventional diagnostics, naturopathic education includes therapeutic nutrition, botanical medicine, homeopathy, natural childbirth, classical Chinese medicine, hydrotherapy, naturopathic manipulative therapy, pharmacology and minor surgery.

**‘Why Choose a Naturopathic Physician After 50?** Many of us are living longer and expecting more from our lives. We want to remain active, mentally and physically, and have come to understand that the quality of our life depends upon our health. Adults in the 50+ age group visit naturopathic physicians for a variety of reasons. Some come for specific health issues or disease conditions, others want to optimize their health and decrease the risk for familial tendencies and/or chronic degenerative diseases. Many are confused by the numerous prescriptions they take and are looking for natural alternatives. Many have questions about the vitamins and herbs they take and want guidance about them. They want information so they can avoid side effects, drug-drug and herb-drug interactions.

‘Naturopathic physicians offer safe, effective, preventive health care for men and women over 50. Sometimes the naturopathic approach requires major lifestyle changes for success. These changes can be more difficult to make as we age. Naturopathic physicians educate their patients and help them make a gradual transition to a healthier lifestyle.’

Here’s an interesting quote from Dr. Andrew Weil in his 1995 bestselling book, *Spontaneous Healing* (The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1995), which sums it up nicely.

Allopathic Medicine (conventional medicine) can... ‘manage trauma better than any other system of medicine; diagnose and treat many medical and surgical emergencies;

treat acute bacterial infections with modern antibiotics; treat some parasitic and fungal infections; prevent many infectious diseases by immunization; diagnose complex medical problems; replace damaged hips and knees; get good results with cosmetic and reconstructive surgery, and it can diagnose and correct hormonal deficiencies.'

Allopathic medicine cannot ... 'treat viral infections; cure most chronic degenerative diseases; effectively manage most kinds of mental illness; cure most forms of allergy or autoimmune disease; effectively manage psychosomatic illnesses, or cure most forms of cancer.'

'Do not seek help from a conventional doctor for a condition that conventional medicine cannot treat, and do not rely on an alternative provider for a condition that conventional medicine can manage well.'

Let me make one point clear. I advocate being knowledgeable about natural healing, so that I can have an educated conversation with health care professionals about the appropriate treatments. I'm also advocating being a good health care consumer, so I'll learn when to go to the doctor, and when I just need to rest in bed for a few days. I am not advocating doctoring myself – if something seems to be wrong, I'll go to a conventional doctor for diagnosis.

Here's another thought. If we're covered by a medical plan at work, it's possible that some of the health care professionals that we need don't belong to the provider network, or that our medical plan doesn't pay very much for their services. It's also possible that some doctors who belong to a provider network only have a few minutes to spend with us, due to pressures in the managed care system. They may focus on diagnosing diseases and prescribing drugs, and might not have the time to discuss optimizing our health or discussing alternative treatments. This is another example of the value of health investments advocated in *Live Long & Prosper* – I need to spend the necessary money for optimizing my health, even if my medical insurance

plan won't pay for it. I'm not going to let a piece of paper (my medical insurance policy) dictate my health. And here's a strategy which I cover more in *Live Long & Prosper!* If I choose a high deductible medical plan, I can save a lot of money on insurance premiums, and use this savings to pay for health care professionals that aren't covered by my medical plan.

Andrew Weil's book *Health and Healing* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998) does a good job of explaining different types of healing practices, and when each might be most effective. It's a great way to learn about this subject, so I can have informed conversations with my health care team. I also list some more resources in *Live Long & Prosper!*

#### **10. Avoid and eliminate toxins in our environment.**

Environmental toxins can contribute to cancer, respiratory and other chronic diseases. If I have a family history of these diseases, I really want to minimize the toxins in my environment.

Here are just two examples which stunned me:

- A late 1990s study by the National Academy of Sciences states 'over 90% of fungicides, 60% of herbicides and 30% of insecticides cause numerous forms of cancer.'
- Another study cites pesticides as the cause of 90% of childhood leukemia.

Many studies are also linking cancer to food additives, hormones used to raise beef and other meats, and toxins in our homes.

If I haven't convinced you yet, here's a quote from John Aguila, a well-known environmental agronomist in my area.

‘Pesticides are biocides, and biocides are defined as a class of compounds that kill life. They have their origins from war, beginning in World War I, and are classified by the U.S. and Geneva Convention Treaty as weapons of mass destruction when used on humans.’

Wow! These got my attention, and I’m telling you for the same reason!

Here are the most common toxins that we encounter, along with possible remedies.

- The best place to start is with what we put in our bodies. Much of the fresh fruit and vegetables we eat have been grown with lots of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. Whenever possible, I buy organic produce. While this is usually more expensive, this is a good example of spending extra money on my health. If I can’t find organic produce, I’ll wash it thoroughly before eating. However, this is just a stop-gap measure. Most conventionally grown fruits and vegetables are permeated with pesticides, fungicides and/or herbicides, which work their way into the entire fruit and vegetable, beyond just the skin. We end up ingesting them, even if we clean off what’s on the surface.
- Continuing on what I put in my body, I like using bottled water or a water filter for my drinking water. At home I use a water filter, to cut down on the land fill created from plastic water bottles. Again, a little more expense, but worth it over the long run.
- Next is what I put on my skin. Cosmetics and soaps can expose us to hundreds of chemicals, and the long-term effects are unknown. I seek natural products that don’t have ingredients whose name I can’t pronounce.
- Let’s turn to what we breathe in our lungs. Most household cleaners have harmful chemicals. Again, natural cleansers might be more expensive, but that’s part of my health

investment. Also, we might have the impression – induced by advertising - that they aren't as effective. If I use natural dishwashing detergents, I might not be able to see myself in the dishes, and if I use natural laundry detergent, my clothes might not be as bright, so it's a tradeoff.

- Continuing with what I put in my lungs, many materials and substances that are common in residences and office buildings produce gases that are bad for our health. At the very least, we should seek adequate air circulation, bringing in fresh air from outside. Ultimately, we should seek out and remove these substances. Since I work in an office building, I make a point to get outside frequently during the day.
- If we live in a city, the air we breathe is often polluted. While moving to an area with cleaner air is one possibility, many of us don't have that option. I try to stay away from breathing exhaust fumes, and I've identified and avoid local sources of air pollution. I heartily support local and national politicians who advocate reduction of air pollution.

I'll make an admission here. I've always been somewhat aware of the threat posed by environmental toxins, and I've taken moderate steps to remove the most obvious threats from my environment. But I didn't get focused until doing the research for this book. We are now familiar with the health threats posed by smoking with respect to lung cancer, and diet and exercise with respect to heart disease, as the result of sustained research and public awareness campaigns. In both cases, in the early years of these campaigns, there was substantial resistance from established interests in affected industries, and the defenders claimed that scientific evidence was inadequate and inconclusive. The medical professions did not jump on board immediately. It took many years for the public at large to finally 'get it.' I believe that the next big area for widespread public awareness is the link between cancer and the multitude of toxins in our environment. Again, substantial research and public awareness campaigns have been

under way for years, and I believe the public at large will finally ‘get it’ over the next several years. I’m now on heightened alert, and I urge you to be on alert also.

Environmental toxins represent a ubiquitous threat to our health - they are simply all over and in our surroundings. Eliminating these toxins from my environment is a lifelong quest, since it will take awhile to learn about all the chemicals that I ingest and change my consuming habits appropriately. I can’t rebuild my house and office space immediately. So, I intend to make long-term progress, and make continuous improvements each year.

There’s a lot to learn, but this will be a lifelong quest for me. I started with *The Safe Shopper’s Bible: A Consumer’s Guide to Nontoxic Household Products* (John Wiley & Sons, 1995), by David Steinman and Samuel Epstein.

In addition, here are some web sites which I will continually visit over the years:

- [www.preventcancer.com](http://www.preventcancer.com)
- [www.prevention.com](http://www.prevention.com)
- [www.scorecard.org](http://www.scorecard.org)
- [www.environmental-toxins.com](http://www.environmental-toxins.com)
- [www.chiro.org/LINKS/Environmental\\_Toxins.shtml](http://www.chiro.org/LINKS/Environmental_Toxins.shtml)
- [www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/toxic\\_flash/toxic\\_house.html](http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/toxic_flash/toxic_house.html)

Or, you can just do an online search using the words ‘environmental toxins’ and you will find a wealth of information.

Let me finish the discussion on environmental toxins with a colorful point. As I mentioned earlier, the defenders state emphatically that scientific evidence on the dangers of environmental toxins is inadequate and inconclusive. I believe that conclusive evidence already exists, but for the moment let’s agree for argument’s sake. Here’s the way I look at it. Right now, our society is conducting a vast, uncontrolled experiment on the dangers of environmental toxins. Most of us belong to the control group – the group which continues the current lifestyle. Some of us can choose to be part of the experimental group, which adopts a healthier lifestyle that reduces our exposure to environmental toxins. In twenty to thirty years, we’ll compare the health of the two groups, and will know the results. I don’t want to wait until twenty or thirty years go by to see the results of this experiment, so I will choose to be in the experimental group. I can’t see any downsides to this choice. Which group do you want to be in?

#### **11. Have a daily practice.**

Many Americans are overstimulated and overstressed, and I’m no exception. I have found that a regular practice at least five times a week has worked wonders for me. This calms my mind, reduces stress, and makes me much more peaceful and able to withstand life’s constant challenges.

The goal is to stop the constant stream of thoughts, feelings and emotions that bombard our consciousness each moment. We don’t need to stop this for very long for significant health benefits – 20 to 30 minutes per day makes a huge difference to help reduce stress and produce a nice state of calm.

In their books I mentioned previously on longevity, Drs. Williams and Khalsa both emphasize the benefits of a daily practice for reducing stress and improving our health and lifespan. Both of them advocate a regular practice of yoga, chi kung, tai chi, stretching and other exercise routines. Dr. Khalsa shares his experience with yoga and other transformative practices, and his book contains some excellent exercises for enhancing brain longevity.

I've dabbled with all of the following practices, and found them all to be quite useful. With the first three – tai chi, chi gung, and yoga, the best way to start is to find a local class or studio. If this isn't practical, I list some videotapes that have helped me get started.

- Tai chi. I've used a video tape by Terence Dunn called *T'ai Chi for Health – Beginning Level*.
- Chi gung. Linda Modaro produces an excellent series of videotapes called *Discovering Chi*.
- Yoga. Rodney Yee produces an excellent series of videotapes.
- Meditation. The book *Meditation for Dummies* (IDG Books Worldwide, 1999) is a good introduction for Westerners.
- Meditative prayer. Reverend Thomas Keating has developed a simple technique called centering prayer. You can find more at the web site [www.centeringprayer.com](http://www.centeringprayer.com), or see Reverend Keating's videotape titled *Kanuga 2002: A Thomas Keating Workshop*.

I encourage you to experiment and see what works for you.

Most of the time, I practice a routine called Integral Transformative Practice (ITP), developed by Michael Murphy and George Leonard. Their 40 minute routine combines gentle stretching, yoga, chi gung, meditation, and self-affirmations, and I highly recommend it. Not only do I get

the benefits of meditation, but I get in my stretching and balance exercises. See their book titled *The Life We Are Given* (Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1995).

## 12. Work out life's problems

Let's put together a fact with a reality.

- *Fact*: many physical illnesses have their roots in emotional challenges.
- *Reality*: it is inevitable that at some point in our life, we will encounter life situations which present emotional trauma, such as death of a loved one, divorce, problems with children, financial setbacks, or the usual issues that arise just because we're human.

When I think about the implications, it makes sense that I find some way to deal with these challenges, other than stuff them or hope they go away on their own. Often just talking with somebody who has seen these problems before can help tremendously. We might be held back by the stigma of the popular image of psychotherapy, where we lie down on a couch and go back to our childhood. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I've faced some life challenges, and was held back by this stereotype. Eventually I overcame my doubts, and found it invaluable. In my situation, it was as simple as talking with a trained professional who has seen my issues a countless number of times. I was able to work through my issues without digging deep into my childhood psyche!

Many employer-provided medical insurance policies will pay for psychotherapy, or will sponsor an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). I highly recommend them, particularly for challenges that cause one or more of the following warning signs:

- Am I losing sleep regularly?
  
- Is my physical health affected – headaches, stomach upsets, fatigue?
  
- Is my ability impaired to meet important obligations, such as work, volunteering schedule, or meetings with friends and family?
  
- Have I increased intake of unhealthy substances such as cigarettes, alcohol, or other substances?

Letting emotional problems go unresolved can take years off our lives, not to mention putting up big obstacles to enjoying life. If these situations are unavoidable, why not just deal with them?

I'm not a salesperson for psychotherapy – there are many other possible resources, including trusted friends and family, church resources, group discussions, or spiritual advisors.

Let me make the obvious connection between this practice and the prior practice on reducing stress. If we don't work out our problems, we'll be stressed!

### **13. Take a health day.**

Periodically I'll devote a half day or full day to my physical and mental well-being. I'll get a treatment that helps me relax and rejuvenate, such as massage, reiki, or healing touch. FYI, reiki and healing touch work with healing and balancing the body's energy system. Right now, their practice is not widespread, but I think they will be more widely accepted in the future, as scientific research uncovers the health benefits. I believe that these practices are currently in the

same position that acupuncture was 20 to 30 years ago with respect to acceptance in the health care community.

I'll spend time in a steam room or Jacuzzi. I'll listen to music, read a book, go to a museum or concert, and look for ways to appreciate beauty in the world.

#### **14. Keep purpose and stimulation**

Use it or lose it. I'm convinced this applies to our later years. In *Live Long & Prosper!* I describe the Dog Aging and Cognition Project study, where the dogs that 'worked' lived longer and had a lower frequency of mental impairment compared to dogs that laid around all day.

To me, this means a few things. I always intend to have purpose in life – strong reasons for getting up in the morning. Each day, I want to look forward to helping somebody, learning something new, or appreciating beauty in the world, or just having some fun. Since physical diseases often have emotional causes, I'll take care of my mental health as well. This is one example of how the subjects of the three sections of *Live Long & Prosper!* – happiness, health, and finances – all fit together. All of these thoughts were verified by the longitudinal studies that I describe in Chapter 3 of *Live Long & Prosper!*

Another problem I see too often is older people who are living alone, or a married couple that never gets out in the world. Meeting and talking with people every day goes a long way to maintaining mental and physical health. I'll arrange my living and working situation to get this stimulation most every day.

## 15. Create a supportive lifestyle

This includes a healthy work/life balance. If we're working too many hours, we won't have the time to take care of ourselves. In addition, we need multiple ways of finding life satisfaction. Trying to get all of life's satisfaction from work is like putting all of our eggs in one basket. However, we should also have enough stimulation, perhaps from work, that keeps us going. Like Goldilocks, we need not too much and not too little of both work and play.

Also, let me repeat a theme that I explore in depth in *Live Long & Prosper!* I'll make sure I have just enough income, so that I have enough money to take care of myself in many ways – health, shelter, food, nutrition, being happy .... the list goes on! If I need to work to get this income, no problem!

This document is intended to complement and reinforce the themes in *Live Long & Prosper!* I don't intend for it to make complete sense without reading the book.

To health and prosperity!