



Optimistic Aging

Research about aging has revealed an optimistic picture: the majority of older people feel well and live active, enjoyable lives. Furthermore, studies have shown that 70% of what is thought of as normal aging is preventable.¹ You read that right—70%! Lifestyle choices have much more of an impact on aging than most people realize.

The apparently inevitable effects of aging are actually a 30-year accumulation of unhealthy choices. Midlife is the ideal time to build healthy habits that will improve life now and set you up to be at your best with age. Even more promising are the findings that it's never too late to make healthy lifestyle choices to improve wellness.² Start taking better care of yourself now, no matter how many candles will be on next year's cake.

This book offers a concise summary of the research findings about aging well to inspire investment in your physical, mental, emotional, and social health. You will be able to have a vibrant life now, and for the duration.

When people think about growing old, they often focus on saving money for retirement. And while it is crucial to make sure that you have enough funds to support your lifestyle and medical needs, it is just as important to invest in all dimensions of health to age optimally and enjoy life fully.

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Financial planners urge us to start saving early so that our investments grow exponentially over time. Similarly, the sooner you invest in well-being, the more benefits you will enjoy. There is much to be done in your 40s, 50s, 60s, and beyond to remain vibrant in your 70s, 80s, and 90s. And unlike most retirement planning, wherein you must sock away money for it to grow into a nest egg for future use, wellness investments pay out right away. Nurture your physical, mental, emotional, and social health now to enrich your life in all those areas right away, as well as down the line.

Crash Course

This book provides a crash course about how to invest your time and energy wisely to have a healthier present and long-term future.

If you love to read and are interested in reading research summaries, this book may seem too sparse. You might want

to read this as a primer or just skip to the recommended reading and notes sections for books and articles on the subject.

But for those of you who don't have the time or interest in reading in-depth research descriptions, this book is written with you in mind. I have studied the research and offer here a short and user-friendly summary of the key findings and recommendations.

This book can be read straight through, or by jumping to specific areas of concern. The first four chapters establish the mindset for change, developing your confidence, positive future vision, and action plan. The next four chapters address each of the four main focal areas of wellness: physical, mental, emotional, and social. The book closes with a discussion of how to put your plan into action.

It may inspire you to read this book cover to cover and see how many ways there are to make the future better. If you are likely to get overwhelmed, simply skim it to find something attainable and start there. Take as long as you need to solidify a new habit so it becomes automatic, then pick up the book again and choose a next step. Customize your path.

Interestingly, all four areas of health are heavily inter-related. For example, being physically active supports the maintenance of mental functioning, and vice versa. Any actions you take will likely support several areas of wellness.

Some action steps appear in more than one health area (for example, exercise is relevant to all four). I have written these sections with extra care to minimize redundancy, to keep you engaged, and to encourage further appreciation of each action step. Keep reading, even if it feels familiar.

Because of misinformation about aging, most people think they're on an inevitable downhill trajectory. However, much of what we fear about getting older is preventable.

To age optimally, you will need:

- (1) knowledge about the right investments of your time and energy
- (2) a mindset for change
- (3) an effective plan to take action and stick with it

This book aims to help you in all of these areas.

The Choice Is Yours

Your choices now will affect your quantity and quality of life later. Your actions will impact your life in a healthy way, or in a way that leads to illness; therefore, it is important to have accurate information about how to promote current and future well-being. The health choices outlined in this book will make your life vibrant, regardless of its length, and will enable you to cope better with life's challenges, including illness and dying.

An interesting distinction in the aging literature is between having a diagnosed disease and feeling sick.³

Researchers observed that people struggling with chronic emotional or physical pain (alcoholism, depression, and arthritis) were more likely to feel sick regardless of their health status otherwise. On the other hand, they found many people with diagnosed diseases who did not experience themselves as ill subjectively. Even with medical problems, they felt well and lived vigorous lives. For example, my father was diagnosed with bladder cancer at age 30 and has worked closely with his doctors to successfully manage it for decades, all the while living a fulfilled life. Now he is 76 years old and still swims the butterfly stroke! When you are proactive about physical, mental, emotional, and social health, you will live and die feeling as well as possible.

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and quality of life later.***

Every day you make choices that greatly affect your quality of life for better or for worse. Don't forget that the default choice of inaction also has significant consequences. Use the information that follows to make educated decisions, focus your time and energy, and take charge of your life and future.

In the dance of life, you are the partner who leads. Your body takes its cues from your behavior and dances along in the chosen direction. Most people don't realize they are

the lead dancer. They think they are at nature's mercy, with decline inevitable. But the research clearly shows that much of what we think of as aging decay is actually the result of lifestyle choices. This book will teach you the dance moves to effectively lead in the partnership with nature and twirl off into the sunset with flair. Once you know the moves, the choices are up to you.