

The New Rules of
AGING
WELL

A Simple Program for Immune Resilience,
Strength, and Vitality

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Photographs by Gentl & Hyers



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PREFACE

In my medical practice, there's something I see again and again: patients in their 40s and 50s who feel as if they've been betrayed by their bodies. They're gaining weight, feeling exhausted, experiencing aches and pains, generally going south. They find that they're getting sick more often, catching everything they're exposed to and taking longer to recover.

People come to me assuming that these “symptoms of aging” are unavoidable. I tell them what I'm going to tell you now: These problems—losing mental sharpness, looking puffy, feeling generally lousy—are absolutely *not* a given of aging. They're a call to action, a sign that you need to change your lifestyle. When patients follow my advice—when they improve their lifestyle—the impact is often immediate.

I've had my own practice in New York City for more than 30 years, a blend of Chinese medicine and Western medicine. But even with my decades of experience, I personally had an awakening in my mid-50s. I changed a few things (habits I once believed were healthy choices), and quickly saw results. These days I'm often mistaken for someone decades younger.

Much of what's effective goes back to the principles of Chinese medicine. Older cultures get so much right about physiological processes and staying vital and strong decade after decade. Now cutting-edge research confirms this thinking. My advice on aging well and building immune resilience comes from this place: It's ancient wisdom backed up by modern science. And it's more important than ever. With new viruses appearing, it's critical to

prioritize immunity and overall wellness. Aging does not have to make you more vulnerable. It can be a wake-up call to become the healthiest you've ever been.

There's no magic pill for health and immunity. There's a *lifestyle* that makes your immune system—and all other systems in the body—stronger. And I want to teach you that. That's why I joined forces with Danielle Claro to write this book—a straightforward guide that details the strategies I've seen work over and over again for patients in their 40s, 50s, 60s, and beyond. A blueprint for optimal function.

It contains everything I teach my patients, and then some, about turning around the so-called symptoms of aging—getting to your ideal weight, staying strong and nimble, sleeping well, enjoying life more—all of which plays into immune resilience. In many cases, this regimen has people looking and feeling younger at 60 than they did at 45.

The ordinary choices you make each day can have extraordinary effects on your overall health and your body's ability to protect itself. You only need to know what to do. I'm thrilled to say, the secrets you need are all right here.

—FRANK LIPMAN, MD

INTRODUCTION

You know that guy at work you thought was 50 and turned out to be 70? Or that woman in yoga class who seemed 40 until she introduced you to her 30-year-old kid? This book is here to help you become like them. To let you in on the health habits of people who age amazingly well—who look great, feel well, and are energetic, happy, sexy, agile, strong. It's not luck, and it's not something that's randomly bestowed on people. It's a result of specific life choices, and it's something anyone can have with motivation and commitment.

How you age has everything to do with the choices you make right now—what you eat and how active you are, but also how you spend your free time and how you see the world around you. There's a lot to it, and yet in some ways it's simple: What you put into your body and mind affects the whole organism, determining function and resilience.

If you're not aging well, there are answers: elements you need to add to your daily life (certain practices, foods, supplements) and others you need to subtract (same list, but different specs). Your body is a complex machine, and keeping it humming along beautifully as you age calls for a plan—one that preps your body to handle whatever the world throws at it.

Aging optimally is not just about living long. It's about being vital and happy and continuing to be able to do the things you love for decades to come. It means tuning in to your own health, becoming your own personal wellness coach, and learning to sense what you need when you need it. It involves responding to

changes, preventing injury, building resilience, and being open to new approaches and new behaviors.

Reconsider what you've been told

In your 40s and 50s, your body begins naturally shifting into a mode where it's taking care of what's there—maintaining—because it's not producing and growing anymore; hormones shift, and cellular function is generally less efficient. But you can still thrive.

If you're achy, tired, gaining weight, not sleeping well, pay attention: These are warning signs. Signals from your body to get your sh*t together while you still can.

This is not a drill. If you want your body to run well as you age, you can't be cavalier anymore about how you treat it. Otherwise, what can happen is that your organs and other systems underperform; this is what makes you feel physically terrible from day to day and weakens your immunity over time. The right choices can radically alter, and even reverse, some of the symptoms our culture has come to accept as normal signs of aging.

You have power in this situation. Some folks worry that they're destined to age a certain way because of the way their relatives did. Nope. The idea of “bad genes” creating your destiny is grossly exaggerated. You can look at your family and gather useful information. You can get genome testing and learn a lot. But this info is only the beginning of the story, because lifestyle choices have a tremendous impact on whether certain genes turn on or off. Studies on identical twins prove this: How you age, in many ways, is up to you.

It's never too late to start

Don't despair or get stuck on changes you wish you'd made sooner. Many studies show that it's never too late to launch new habits and see results. Improvements make a difference at any age, and at any point in your health journey. Today is a great day to start. You'll notice positive effects pretty quickly.

Building a strong immune system

All the advice in this book—from when and how you eat to how much you sleep to what type of exercise you get—is designed to build immune resilience. Many of your immune cells turn over every month. How well they function is a direct response to the way you take care of yourself. Sure, there's some loss of function as we age, but it's a myth that weak immunity is a given after a certain point. We're going to show you the everyday practices and larger life philosophy that keep immunity hardy.

One of the most important things that happens when you're taking good care of yourself is that the immune system's self-cleaning mechanism, known as autophagy, kicks in on a daily basis. The definition of autophagy (accent on the second syllable—*au-TAHF-a-gee*) is digestion of cellular waste by enzymes of the same cell. In other words, it's your cells cleaning up their own debris. When your autophagy is bright and awake and working well, your body recovers faster and better. Everything in this book helps boost autophagy and keep the immune system operating optimally.

Nurturing your longevity genes

There are 20 or so genes that researchers have recently identified as “longevity genes”—those with the potential to help us live longer, healthier lives. Some you may have heard of are the sirtuins AMPK and mTOR.

The pathways of many of these longevity genes respond to lifestyle habits: what, when, and how much you eat; how you move your body; how much restful sleep you get; and how much stress you endure, among other things. Regulating these gene pathways up or down through healthy habits can extend your life span and expand your “health span”—the vitality level throughout your life—and that’s what this book is all about.

Small “stresses” make you stronger

An overarching theme of nurturing your longevity genes and aging well is the concept of hormesis. Hormesis is your body’s response to small healthy stresses—say, fasting for a short time, or biking up a brief, steep hill. These little stresses, or short periods of adversity, stimulate the body’s defenses against aging without doing harm. You’ll hear a lot about hormesis as we continue. It’s an easy umbrella under which a lot of our advice lives, and it can help you think about self-maintenance in a new way. Small stresses regarding food, exercise, and temperature are challenges you’re going to seek out from now on. It’s a playful, proactive way to approach wellness, and a great way to reframe necessities like stepping outside on an ice-cold morning to walk the dog (skip the coat).

Cues from nature

Your body is smart. It has the ability and the inclination to link with larger natural cycles: day and night, the change of seasons. All your organs have rhythms. When you work *with* your body clock—eating, sleeping, and exercising when your body is most primed to do so—your systems can work efficiently. When you don't, your body is forced to compensate, which takes energy away from important processes. It's the difference between swimming with the current and fighting your way upstream. Throughout this book, we encourage you to take advantage of that current, to use what's already there, the natural built-in rhythms of healthy living. This makes it so much easier to age well.

Mitochondria and telomeres

Mitochondrial function and telomere length are aging mechanisms that come up throughout this book. Mitochondria, as you may know, are the energy powerhouses of the cells. Autophagy—the body's self-cleaning system, mentioned above—helps mitochondria stay strong, which in turn makes you feel and look better. Research is uncovering more every day about the significance of mitochondria to healthy aging.

Telomeres are the caps on the ends of DNA strands—like aglets on the tips of a shoelace. A recent Harvard study brought to light the importance of telomeres in our understanding and possible manipulation of the effects of aging. Long, strong telomeres indicate youth and health. Bad habits shorten telomeres. The lifestyle we teach in this book is designed to keep telomeres as long and strong as possible.

The science is important, but what it looks like in real life is simple everyday choices; that's what builds immune resilience and helps certain people age spectacularly. This book is here to teach the right habits and help you implement them. Once in place, these practices keep autophagy kicking in daily, make your mitochondria efficient, maintain the length and strength of telomeres, minimize inflammation, build immune resilience, and much more. When these systems are thriving, everything else works well too.

It's not always easy to make changes. But there's momentum to good habits. Locking in one makes the next one easier to add, and the one after that even more of a breeze. Pretty soon you don't even need to think about them. You're reflexively making great choices. You're supporting your body. You're optimizing function. All systems are go. You're aging well.

Stay with us. We're going to help you get to that place. You won't believe how great you're going to feel.

LEVEL 1:

THE ESSENTIALS

Powerful changes you can
make today to strengthen
immunity, increase energy,
and age better immediately

Just. Eat. Less.

The biggest factor in healthy aging is simply eating less. After about age 45, your body just doesn't need as many calories as it once did—it's not building anymore; it's protecting and preserving. This requires less fuel.

A recent study showed that subjects who reduced calories by 30 percent lived longer and even avoided some age-related diseases. This research didn't even take into account what the subjects were eating, only the amount. So this single change—eating less now, and cutting back a little more every five years or so—can have a serious impact.

Consuming less food is also easier on your system. Less food means less for your body to process, less garbage for it to dispose of. It lightens the workload, and that translates into better overall function.

It may sound like a big ask. We get that. Some of the happiest times in life are centered around food. Time around the table with family and friends is precious and, in fact, also an important part of aging well—community, love, sharing, connection. Just be smart about what's *on* that table and be conscious of habits that need tweaking. Do you always overeat when you're with certain friends? With your family of origin? When you drink? When you're feeding others? Parenting can be very food-centric, but as kids get older, life becomes less about three meals a day; you may be at a place where you can tune in to your own needs (and adjust for age), rather than eat according to the clock.

Obviously, one of the most effective ways to reduce calories is to cut out starchy and refined carbs. Bread, pasta, rice, and other white foods (cauliflower notwithstanding) are not only basically devoid of nutrients but are also potentially dangerous. Most of us lose the ability to process carbs well as we age—that’s why there’s an increased risk of diabetes (carbs turn to sugar in the body). This is serious. More than 100 million adults in the United States have diabetes or prediabetes. Cutting empty carbs in favor of nutrient-dense foods is one important way to lower your risk. A note: When we talk about diabetes in this book, we’re referring to type 2 diabetes, a condition caused by lifestyle habits, not type 1 diabetes, which is an autoimmune disease.

Of course, food can be complicated. At times, the perception of hunger may be a need for something else—distraction, affection, exercise, fresh air, sleep, even just water. Eating less is about staying alert, being sensitive to your body, and watching out for automatic behaviors (heading straight to the kitchen the minute you walk in the door, say, without stopping to wonder if you’re actually even hungry).

Start with the simple idea of eating till you’re only 80 percent full. It’s the difference between satisfying your hunger and feeling the need to unbutton your pants. This alone can be life-altering.





16-hour overnight fasting

Short fasts benefit you in a few ways. One is simple calorie reduction: When you don't eat for an extended period of time, you naturally (and effortlessly) eat less overall. Another is that your digestive system works better when it has a chance to rest and recover—and in fact, your body can repair itself better when it isn't constantly diverting energy to digestion. Third, fasting causes major changes in several crucial hormones that impact aging and weight, including insulin and growth hormone. Fourth, fasting is one of those hormetic “small stresses” that stimulate the longevity gene pathways. Fifth—and this is big—fasting kicks in autophagy, the cellular detox process critical to strong immunity and aging well.

So here's the plan: A couple of times a week, have dinner on the early side, and the first meal the next day a little later, leaving a good 16 hours in between. This simple practice is incredibly powerful. And it's not that difficult. You make it a point to finish dinner by 7 or 8 p.m. You're sleeping for seven or eight hours, we hope (see sleep more and sleep better). In the morning, you get up and have a big glass of water. And then you eat a nice nutritious meal at 11 or 12.

Admittedly, fasting can be a challenge at first. You don't have to go from zero to 16 if this sounds insane to you. Start with 12 hours, then move to 14, building to 16. Once your body adjusts, fasting feels great and is weirdly liberating. Realizing that you don't need to eat all the time—that your body functions well and doesn't require constant loading—is freeing, and helps you break that carb addiction. Soon you'll find your fasting days refreshing: less of a

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