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BUMRUNGRAD INTERNATIONAL HOSPITAL: THE CONTINUING MYSTERIES OF AGEING**WELLNESS** ■ WANVIPUT SANPHASITVONG

The continuing mysteries of ageing

Even in today's hi-tech world, the unfortunate fact remains: We still feel the effects of ageing. Ageing is a tremendously complex process which can be defined in the simplest terms as the accumulation of all of the body's degenerative processes which, ultimately, leads to death.

THEORIES ON AGEING

There are several theories about why ageing-related processes must, and do, occur. The "Wear-and-Tear Theory" is rooted in the belief that ageing is caused by inflammation which, in turn, is the result of free radicals. As cells produce energy, the process yields a by-product: free radicals. Free radical production can be exacerbated by such things as poor nutrition habits and exposure to pollution and the sun's UV rays. According to the theory, as the accumulation of free radicals grows over time, it begins to hinder the body's natural disease-fighting defences. Healthy lifestyle choices, such as following a diet rich in vitamins, nutrients and antioxidants, are believed to help combat the problem.

A second prominent theory, known as the "Neuroendocrine Theory", links ageing to hormone production. Proponents of the theory believe that as we age, the hypothalamus gland begins to weaken, resulting in declining hormone production. In fact, only the amount of stress hormones (called glucocorticoids)

increases with age, contributing to an increased risk of serious health problems, including heart disease, stroke, dementia and depression. According to the theory, slowing the ageing process depends on preserving the function of the hypothalamus by reducing stress through such means as relaxation, meditation and exercise.

CROSS-LINKING

A third ageing theory, known as "Cross-Linking", states that simple sugars in our bodies bind together to form harmful

proteins that raise a person's risk for a wide range of health problems — everything from cataracts to kidney disease — which are already tied to the ageing process.

These and other aging theories are in basic agreement that the body's inflammation processes play a central role in how we age. And while backers of the various theories continue to debate their merits, each individual has the power to slow the pace of the ageing process. While the medical community continues to explore solutions to the effects of



ageing, we need not surrender and "feel our age"; instead, each of us can take responsibility for our health and wellness, particularly when it comes to stepping up our preventive efforts.

The most effective action to slow the ageing process is to follow a healthier lifestyle. Think of the foundation of staying young as having three pillars: the first is built on avoiding stress whenever possible, adopting a positive, optimistic attitude and enjoying plenty of good laughs. The second pillar is exercise. People who remain active through regular exercise live longer, happier lives and exude a positive attitude.

Thirdly, you must eat well. The saying, "you are what you eat" is never more true than when it comes to fighting ageing. Boost your health with a diet that includes a wide variety of foods that provide necessary vitamins and nutrients.

These three components to a healthy life are interconnected and more powerful together. You won't enjoy the full set of benefits if you only follow one or two of them. Successful ageing requires an holistic approach.

TAKE IT SLOW

Healthy living shouldn't feel like an unpleasant chore or burden. If you've been neglecting your health, it can be tempting to go to extremes to make up for lost time by being overly strict with yourself. Though your intention is to

boost your health, the radical changes may do more harm than good. Vigorous exercise actually produces more free radicals, so over-exercising yourself at the gym can work against you.

Studies have also shown that people who grant themselves an occasional "cheat day" to eat whatever they like tend to have better thyroid function than those who are more restrained. Healthy living is a way of life, so the occasional treat can be a good thing.

Nutrition and exercise are usually the first things we think of changing to benefit our health, but managing stress is equally important. Life can be a whirlwind of activity and a constant struggle to balance career, family responsibility and an active social life. With so much to accomplish, it's easy to forget about the dangers of stress; but the busier you are, the greater priority you should make reducing stress.

Stress places a tremendous burden on the body and is a contributing factor to many dangerous health conditions — obesity, diabetes and heart disease, to name a few. Be on guard for the symptoms of stress — difficulty sleeping, feeling fatigued, dreaming about work — so you can identify the problem earlier and begin to take action to reduce the stress you're placing on mind and body. After all, your good health and wellness are depending on you.

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