

Healthy Aging FOR DUMMIES®

by Brent Agin, MD, and Sharon Perkins, RN



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Dedication

We dedicate this book to all the readers who are going to make positive changes in their lives. In the book, we offer a lot of information and tips to improve your lifestyle and health; all you have to do is go for it! Feeling healthy is the goal, and this book is your motivation. To date, whether it's mental or physical health, neither of us has ever met a person who hasn't been able to get healthier if he or she tried. Conversely, the people who've really put their hearts and souls into the effort have beat odds time and again and have achieved amazing personal goals. So here's to you and to the rest of your healthy lives!

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Introduction

If you're like many folks today, you realize that not only are people living longer than they used to, but also some of those people are living amazingly well while looking great. What's their secret to living such an independent, active, and radiant lifestyle? The answer lies in their healthy lifestyles — an approach to life we revisit multiple times in this book. The goal of this book is to educate you on the healthy choices you can make that reward you with a healthier, longer, happier life.

Some of the greatest threats to healthy aging come from disease and illnesses that cut your life short and the unhealthy choices that may have caused them. The good news is you can prevent many of these illnesses. Consider these facts:

- ✔ Nearly 80 million U.S. adults have some form of cardiovascular disease (CVD), and someone in the U.S. dies every 36 seconds from CVD.
- ✔ More than 20 million people have diabetes, and adults with diabetes die from heart disease at a rate two to four times higher than adults without diabetes.
- ✔ Heart disease and stroke account for about 65 percent of deaths in people with diabetes.
- ✔ Nearly 70 percent of Americans are overweight and more than 30 percent are obese.

These statistics focus on only a few health conditions, but we could give you similar numbers for many other ailments that people encounter as they get older. Wonder where all these statistics come from? In this book, many of the statistics we quote are from the World Health Organization (WHO), so if we don't cite a source, you can assume that WHO is it. So with this information in mind, take a look at some of the secrets to healthy aging. Here are a few keys to success:

- ✔ **Prevention:** By arming yourself with solid knowledge and making changes to your current lifestyle, you won't necessarily live longer (although you may), but you will live a better *quality* of life.
- ✔ **Moderation:** Easy does it and in small doses. Making small but significant changes in your life can make a difference over time.
- ✔ **Timing:** Start now! Whether you are 20-something or 70-something, you are the CEO of your body, and it's up to you to manage it.

✔ **Practice:** Much of the way you live is based on habits — some good, some bad — formed over a lifetime. Incorporating new routines in place of old habits takes some getting used to. In time and with consistent practice, these lifestyle changes can replace old habits and become second nature.

It's never too early or too late to start taking care of your body. The sooner you treat your body as if it's the only one you're going to get, the sooner you're on your way to healthy aging. Your body needs continuous respect and appreciation and if treated well can provide a wonderful, healthy life.

About This Book

This book is an excellent choice if you want to maximize your body's potential now and for as long as you own it. Whether you want to make a small adjustment, need some fine-tuning, or have to make a major overhaul, you find helpful advice in the pages of this book.

Our goal is to lay out the reasons why your body ages, explain the normal course of aging, and show you how aging is accelerated by your lifestyle choices. We've also given you information on how to prevent or reverse the effects of aging, disease, and illness.

You may be a 20-something looking for some tips on strength training and nutrition, while also wanting to know how to prevent illness while you're still young. On the other hand, you could be in early retirement or even beyond that point, looking to recreate the energy and great health you had when you were younger, while getting up to date on the important preventative health exams. Either way, we present you with useful material in an easy-to-follow fashion to help you achieve your goals. If you happen to be passionate about a particular topic (like muscles or nutrition), don't worry — we cover every subject in detail and even refer you to other *For Dummies* books in case you just can't get enough!

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate easily through this book, we set up a few conventions used consistently throughout the book:

- ✔ Anytime we want to highlight new words or terms defined in the text, we *italicize* them.
- ✔ **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate the action part of numbered steps and the keywords of a bulleted list.
- ✔ We use `monofont` for Web sites and e-mail addresses.

When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If you come across these instances, rest assured that we haven't put in any extra characters (such as a hyphen) to indicate the break. So, when typing one of these Web addresses in a Web browser, just type in exactly what you see, pretending as if the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

That's right — you don't have to read this book cover-to-cover to find helpful information. Any text you find in a gray box is a sidebar. Sidebars contain interesting but unessential information. If you're in a hurry to get to the meat of the chapter, feel free to skip them and return to them later. Another area you can skip over, if you wish, are the places marked with a Technical Stuff icon. If you're the type who wants to know all the technical details, you'll enjoy these two areas; otherwise you can move on without missing essential information.

Foolish Assumptions

This book is for anyone who wants to live a healthier life, and we figure that means just about everyone! If you've picked up this book, we assume you fall into one or more of these categories:

- ✔ You're alive and want to stay that way for awhile, and you want to do so disease- and illness-free, as independent as possible, and with your mind as sharp as a tack.
- ✔ You're having some health issues and are willing to make some modifications to your lifestyle to be healthier but aren't sure what to do.
- ✔ You have no interest in reading a dry medical textbook; you want an easy-to-follow reference book with some helpful "how-to's" and "show-me-the-ways."
- ✔ You want a book that gives you the straight facts about what you need to know about how your body and mind work in order to make wise choices for healthy living, as well as how to adapt your lifestyle choices according to your age.
- ✔ You want to get a few laughs while you digest the information, because aging isn't always so easy to cope with.

How This Book Is Organized

Healthy Aging For Dummies is organized into six parts. Each part addresses a major area of the hows, whats, and whys of healthy aging. Because of this organization, it's simple to find the topic that you're looking for. Here's a quick overview of what you can find in each part.

Part I: So You Want to Look and Feel Young Forever . . .

If you want something badly enough, you must be willing to work for it. There's no Fountain of Youth, and there's no free lunch, either. In these chapters, you find out how to assess your current health, evaluate your challenges and strengths, and set your mark on what you desire most. More importantly, we show you how to achieve your goals.

Part II: Workin' on Your Framework

The chapters in this part discuss the fundamentals of caring for your permanent fixtures and structures, such your teeth, skin, and joints. As for your teeth, tooth loss is *not* solely a sign of aging — it's often a sign of poor dental hygiene, so we tell you what to do to keep those choppers for life. Your skin is your body's first line of defense against disease and illness, so protect it and care for it. We tell you how. We also fill you in on why bones become weak and brittle as the years pass, what lifestyle factors accelerate this process, and what you can do to prevent it.

Part III: Using Nutrition to Extend Your Expiration Date

Your body uses food as fuel to operate at maximum efficiency. The better the fuel, the better your body runs. While your body can survive on a diet of French fries, soda, processed meats, and cream-filled pastries, you pay a price. This part provides you with guidelines for using nutrition and supplements to help your body perform at its best for the long haul.

Part IV: Getting Physical

The human body is meant to move, and most people don't use their bodies to their full capabilities. Your muscles ache to be worked to the point of fatigue in order to rebuild and do it all over again. This part aims to get you excited about revving up your body to do what it craves. In turn, your body serves you well in the long run.

Part V: Sharpening the All-Important Mind and Spirit

For many folks, losing their memory (or their mind) is one of the biggest concerns of getting older. In this section, we explain the differences between normal memory loss and memory loss due to disease, how to improve your memory, and how maintaining an upbeat outlook on life positively influences your overall health and well-being.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

This part presents helpful information in lists of ten items each. You can read about ten myths and get the facts behind them. Find the ten proven most healthy foods, play ten mind games to stretch your brain power, and discover ways to make your home safer as you age.

In addition, we threw in a handy Appendix with a questionnaire to help you and your doctor determine your current state of health. From there, you can create a roadmap for healthy living.

Icons Used in This Book

This book uses icons — small graphics or images in the margins — to mark certain paragraphs of information that you may find useful. Here's the run-down of the helpful icons we use in this book.



When you see this icon, you'll find a helpful hint about doing something to help you age gracefully.



This icon denotes critical information that you need to take away with you. Be sure to read it.



Once in a while, we go a bit deeper into the info on aging. This icon tips you off to that type of information. You can skip over these icons and still be able to age with perfection, but the info they contain enhances your understanding of healthy aging ever further.



The Warning icon cautions you against something that's potentially harmful. Be sure to read and heed the information with these icons.

Where to Go from Here

You don't have to start at Chapter 1 and read straight through this book. Just like all *For Dummies* books, this one is set up so you can read any chapter, in any order, and still come out ahead. Sound good? Then keep on reading. (Starting wherever you want, of course.)

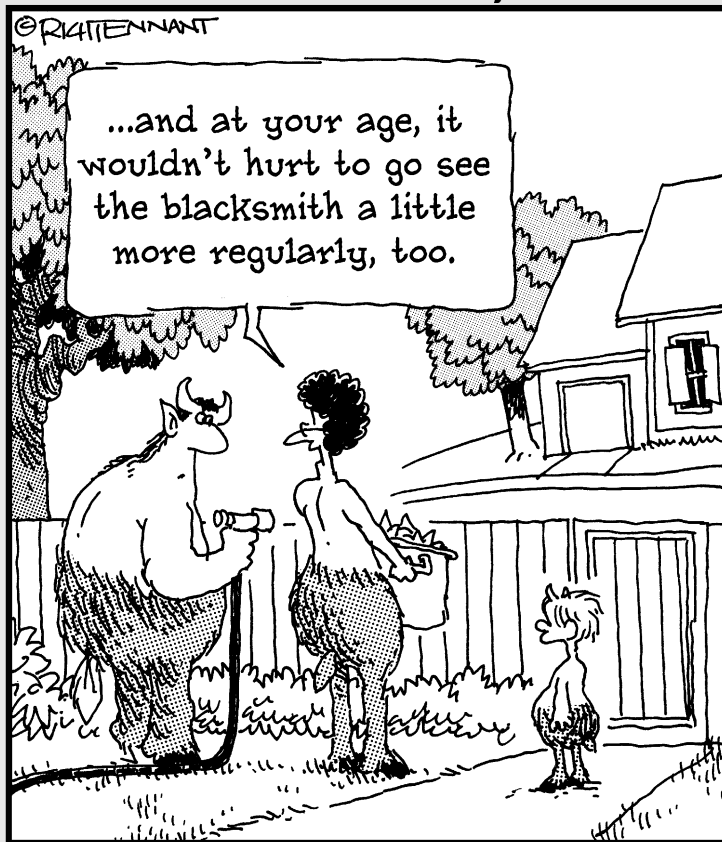
We're partial to this book and would love for you to read the whole thing, but if you don't have the time to do so (or just don't feel like it), we recommend that you make sure to read Chapter 3, because we believe it's one of the most critical chapters in the whole book. It covers what you should know about your family's health history, what checkups you need when, and how to create a plan for healthy aging. We encourage you to check out why setting goals and creating a plan is so vital. After you have your goals and an action plan in place, you can better use the information in this book. We'll be with you every step of the way.

Part I

So You Want to Look and Feel Young Forever . . .

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

Why is 40 the new 30 or 60 the new 50? If people are actually looking and feeling younger today than they did 50 years ago, how are they doing it? What are the biggest roadblocks to living a longer, healthier life, and how can you maneuver around them?

In this part, we reveal the secrets to looking and feeling younger so you can evaluate your health, habits, and wellness goals.

Chapter 1

The Fountain of Youth, at Your Fingertips

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the current life expectancy
 - ▶ Uncovering proven methods to combat aging
 - ▶ Looking at the staggering numbers of preventable deaths
-

Over the years, thousands of people have searched for the elusive Fountain of Youth, and although some have claimed to have found it, for most, it remains a hidden treasure. Great strides have been made in uncovering the secrets to aging healthfully and lengthening the lifespan, but there's still progress to be made. As much as you may wish otherwise, most people know there's no magic pill for good health and longevity. It takes commitment, work, and sometimes even denial of self — giving up poor eating habits, couch potato lifestyle, and the stressful schedules so many are addicted to — to stay healthy as you get older. You may be taking care of the externals but skipping over the basics of good health, which are also the basics of aging well.

You can't skip over the basics so easily, though. Balance is a big key in life, and healthy aging is no different. Skipping over essential healthcare is like ignoring routine maintenance on your car — the end result can be costly and dangerous.

Healthy aging is a current hot topic, and you can thank the baby boomer generation — the oldest of these people are now heading into their 60s — for today's emphasis on youthful, healthy aging. In this chapter, we discuss why people are living longer and better today than in previous generations, what impacted life expectancy a century ago, and what impacts our health and longevity today.

Life Expectancy in the 21st Century

The last 100 years have seen a tremendous change in the way people live and the ailments they fall prey to. The epidemics of yesterday have been wiped out in industrialized countries, and life expectancy has increased. But even though folks are living longer today, this life expectancy brings a whole new set of problems and solutions.

Today, many folks take for granted that they'll live into adulthood, while in the past, people were well aware of the unpredictable threats on their lives. Some of the most damaging health threats in the world today can be modified by lifestyle choices. Making healthy choices is the basis of healthy aging and the recurrent theme of this book.

To examine why people live longer lives today, you must first look at why people *didn't* live as long more than a century ago. This section focuses on the differences.

That was then . . .

Malnutrition, acute illnesses, infant mortality, and war were major contributors to shorter life expectancy 100 years ago. In the period of 1918 to 1919, the influenza virus (the flu) infected more than 400 million people worldwide and killed nearly 40 million. Today people still die from the flu, but not nearly at the mortality rates common in the past.

Poor living conditions and poor sanitation were also major causes of death. Each incident people experienced had a negative cumulative effect on their health. Even diseases that didn't result in death left people more likely to develop chronic illnesses when they grew older and lead to poor life expectancy.



The statistical probability of a person 100 years ago going through life unscathed was extremely low. Here are a few of the problems that caused widespread disease and mortality then:

- ✓ **Crowded and unsanitary living conditions:** These scenarios resulted in multiple outbreaks of malaria, cholera, dysentery, typhoid fever, yellow fever, and flu. Survivors often faced lifelong health consequences.
- ✓ **War:** War caused death directly and also exposed soldiers to foreign disease. During the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865 there were twice as many deaths from disease associated with the poor health than from battle wounds. More than 200 million people died in the beginning of the 20th century from a combination of combat and disease.

- ✓ **Viral and bacterial infections with no medical treatments or vaccines:** Viruses and bacteria infections caused death in high numbers of both adults and children. Worldwide there have been many pandemics (affecting a large group, even the world) from the Spanish Flu in 1918 to the Asian Flu in 1957 that killed more than 50 million people. Polio, smallpox, diphtheria, and measles killed many adults and children before the advent of vaccines and still do in third world countries.
- ✓ **Hazardous work environments and hard physical labor:** Starting as young as age 13, exposed to dangerous fumes and bacteria, and with minimal protective equipment, people worked 10- to 12-hour shifts. The number of work-related deaths peaked around 1900 and then started to improve with the formation of unions and other safety requirements.
- ✓ **Lack of certain nutrients:** People from soldiers to sailors as well as malnutrition in the poverty stricken suffered from lack of nutrients. These deficiencies included
 - **Pellagra:** A deficiency of niacin (b3) that may include symptoms of dermatitis, diarrhea, dementia, and death.
 - **Goiter:** Goiter is caused by a lack of iodine in a child's diet that can lead to hyperthyroidism (elevated thyroid hormone). Complications include heart problems, impaired mental function, and birth defects.
 - **Scurvy:** Lack of vitamin C led to scurvy, a condition where the body can't properly absorb iron, causing anemia.
 - **Rickets:** This affliction was due to a lack of vitamin D, which is necessary for bone mineralization. Children with rickets had bones that didn't fully develop and were deformed, often with the classic bowing of the legs. Kids were also more susceptible to whooping cough and measles.

... *This is now*

There has been a change in the major health concerns today versus 100 years ago, but globally, some similarities still exist. Worldwide, infectious disease is still a major cause of death, and the threat of newer strains of viruses and bacteria are always present. In addition, the mutation of "superbugs" that are immune to many antibiotics has been created by overuse of antibiotics.



Major medical discoveries and inventions have improved the outcomes of many conditions by earlier diagnosis and better medications and treatments, but lifestyle changes have resulted in the current prevalence of chronic and often preventable diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, respiratory illness, diabetes, and stroke, which have the highest mortality rates today (see Chapter 2 for more info).

Over the years, medical advances have fueled the changes that have overcome some major health threats to society. Here is the list of major contributors:

- ✓ **Infant vaccinations:** Today, over 80 percent of children age three or younger receive vaccinations. As a result, some of the deadly diseases, like smallpox and polio, are completely controlled in developed countries, while worldwide programs try to spread this success into the underdeveloped countries. Furthermore, new vaccines are available (like for chicken pox) that weren't available 30 years ago. People born in 1955 were the first to receive vaccinations in infancy, starting with polio. That factor alone significantly increased that generation's lifespan. In the years to follow, more childhood vaccines were added, such as measles in 1963, mumps in 1967, and rubella in 1969.
- ✓ **Antibiotics:** People have been receiving antibiotics since the 1940s for bacterial infections, such as syphilis, tuberculosis, malaria, and pneumonia. Penicillin was discovered in 1928 and first used medically in 1940. After the discovery of penicillin, the rate of development of newer antibiotics was paralleled by fear of emerging resistant bacteria. In the 1950s, new resistant bacteria emphasized the need to limit use of antibiotics to keep new resistant bacteria from emerging. Today, the improper use of antibiotics is widespread, leaving researchers nervous about the inevitable development of newer resistant bugs. Follow your doctor's recommendation about taking antibiotics seriously to help avoid further resistant strains from improper antibiotic use.
- ✓ **Medical technology:** Medical technology drives the improvements in modern medicine. To make better medications, vaccines, and diagnostic tests, there needs to be advances in equipment to identify and create them. Diagnosing disease in its early stages, which improves outcome, comes from better diagnostic imaging. Patients with disease that has advanced to a point where organs are failing are given hope from technology advancements in prosthetics, organ transplantation, and tissue repair. Here are a few of the major breakthroughs:
 - The *artificial heart* can be used to keep heart failure patients alive until they can receive a donor heart.
 - *Computer-aided tomography (CAT) scan* produces three-dimensional images of the body that can show doctors whether a tumor is present and how deep it is in the body, to guide diagnosis and treatments.
 - *Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)* is when magnetic fields and radio waves cause atoms to give off tiny radio signals, making it possible to detect cancer and other ailments early.



Despite these amazing advances, some diseases are still constant — cardiovascular disease (CVD) is still the leading cause of death in the world, and although cancer, respiratory illness, and diabetes all trail behind, they're still major health threats (see Chapter 2 for more info on cancer and CVD).