

# 18 Secrets for a Longer Life



## Protect Your DNA

As you age, the ends of your chromosomes -- called telomeres -- become shorter. This makes you more likely to get sick. But lifestyle changes can boost an enzyme that increases their length. Plus, studies show diet and exercise can protect them. The bottom line: Healthy habits may slow aging at the cellular level.



## Play to Win

An 80-year study found that people who are conscientious -- meaning they pay attention to detail, think things through, and try to do what's right -- live longer. They do more things to protect their health and make choices that lead to stronger relationships and better careers.



## Make Friends

Here's one more reason to be grateful for your friends -- they might help you live longer. Australian researchers found elderly social butterflies were less likely to die over a 10-year period compared to people with the fewest friends. A look at results from 148 more studies shows a clear link between social ties and a long life.



## Choose Friends Wisely

Your friends' habits rub off on you, so look for buddies with healthy lifestyles. Your chances of becoming obese go up if you have a friend who adds extra pounds. Smoking also spreads through social ties, but the good news is that quitting is also contagious.



### **Quit Smoking**

It's no secret that giving up cigarettes can lengthen your days, but the amount of extra time may surprise you. A 50-year British study shows that quitting at age 30 could increase your lifespan by an entire decade. Kicking the habit at age 40, 50, or 60 can add 9, 6, or 3 years to your life, respectively.



### **Embrace the Siesta**

A siesta is standard in many parts of the world, and now there's scientific evidence that napping may help you live longer. A study that involved 24,000 people suggests those who have a regular snooze are 37% less likely to die from heart disease than those who rarely steal a few winks. Researchers think naps might help your heart by keeping stress hormones down.



### **Follow a Mediterranean Diet**

The Mediterranean diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, and fish. An analysis of 50 studies involving more than half a million people confirms the benefits. It can put a serious dent in your risk of metabolic syndrome -- a mix of obesity, high blood sugar, increased blood pressure, and other factors that make you more likely to get heart disease and diabetes.



### **Eat Like an Okinawan**

The people of Okinawa, Japan, once lived longer than any other group on Earth. The region's traditional diet, which is high in green and yellow vegetables, and low in calories gets the credit. Plus, some Okinawans made a habit of eating only 80% of the food on their plate. Younger generations have dropped the old ways and aren't living as long as their ancestors.



### **Get Hitched**

Married people tend to outlive their single friends. Researchers say it's due to the social and economic support that wedded bliss provides. While a current union offers the greatest benefit, people who are divorced or widowed have lower death rates than those who've never tied the knot.



### **Lose Weight**

If you're overweight, slimming down can protect against diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions that take years off your life. Belly fat is bad for you, so focus on deflating that spare tire. A 5-year study of Hispanics and African-Americans suggests eating more fiber and exercising regularly are great ways to whittle your middle.



### **Keep Moving**

The evidence is clear -- people who exercise live longer on average than those who don't. Dozens of studies show that regular physical activity lowers your risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, some forms of cancer, and depression. It may even help you stay mentally sharp in into old age. Ten-minute spurts are fine, as long as they add up to about 2.5 hours of moderate exercise per week.



### **Drink in Moderation**

Heart disease is less common in moderate drinkers than in people who don't drink at all. On the other hand, too much alcohol pads the belly, boosts blood pressure, and can cause a host of other health problems. If you drink alcohol, the limit should be one drink a day for women and one or two for men. But if you don't drink, don't start. There are better ways to protect your heart!



### **Get Spiritual**

People who attend religious services tend to live longer than those who don't. In a 12-year study of people over age 65, those who went more than once a week had higher levels of a key immune system protein than their peers who didn't. The strong social network that develops among people who worship together may contribute to your overall health.



### **Forgive**

Letting go of grudges has surprising physical health benefits. Chronic anger is linked to decreased lung function, heart disease, stroke, and other ailments. Forgiveness will reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, and help you breathe more easily. These benefits tend to increase as you get older.



### **Use Safety Gear**

Accidents are the fifth most common cause of death in the U.S., and the top cause of death for people ages 1 to 24. Wearing safety gear is a simple way to boost your odds of a long life. For example, seatbelts reduce the chances of death or serious injury in a car wreck by 50%. Most deaths from bike accidents are caused by head injuries, so always wear a helmet.



### **Make Sleep a Priority**

Getting enough good quality sleep can lower your risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and mood disorders. It'll also help you recover from illness faster. Burning the midnight oil, on the other hand, is bad for you. Snooze for less than 5 hours a night and you might boost your chances of dying early, so make sleep a priority.



### **Manage Stress**

You'll never completely avoid stress, but you can learn good ways to control it. Try yoga, meditation, or deep breathing. Even a few minutes a day can make a difference.



### **Maintain a Sense of Purpose**

Hobbies and activities that have meaning for you may lengthen your life. Japanese researchers found men with a strong sense of purpose were less likely to die from stroke, heart disease, or other causes over a 13-year period compared to those who were less sure of themselves. Being clear about what you're doing and why can also lower your chances of getting Alzheimer's disease.

*Source: <http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/ss/slideshow-longer-life-secrets>*

Reviewed by [Carol DerSarkissian](#) on April 28, 2016

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