

Q&A

Moderation and balance are the secret to a long, healthy life

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It's not inevitable to age poorly, says author Lorraine Maita



Dr. Lorraine Maita's family history includes high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes but the 55-year-old has none of these.

"It's not inevitable to age (poorly) and be in a wheelchair in a nursing home," says Maita, of New Jersey, who has just published *Vibrance for Life, how to live younger and healthier.*" She is a specialist in geriatric health and health consultant to Fortune 500 companies.

She keeps a keen watch on her health and, the minute she sees her blood pressure or cholesterol climbing, she tackles this with activity and diet right away. As modern medicine has helped people live longer, infectious diseases have been overtaken by life-style related chronic degenerative conditions, she says, citing heart disease, stroke and arthritis.

The *Star* asked her how to live long and well.

What's the secret of a long, healthy life?

The secret is moderation and balance. I say a person should SHINE — S is for stress management; H for hormone balance; I is for intake, including environmental toxins and preservatives; N is for nutrition and E is for exercise. There should also be another S for supplements, that's a good thing to do. Many people are deficient in lots of nutrients such as magnesium, B vitamins, fibre and Vitamin D.

Have we underestimated the effect of stress on health?

While people are aware that stress can affect their health, they're not always sure how it affects them or the magnitude. It's really how you handle the stress, many people with high stress can handle it well but others just fall apart.

What does stress do?

Stress really affects our hormones — adrenalin and cortisol. They raise blood pressure and heart rate and after the event you can feel very tired. If cortisol stays high, it takes calcium out of bones, decreases muscle mass and stores fat around the middle. Cortisol raises insulin which has been implicated in metabolic syndrome, obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol and triglycerides and is linked to inflammation and cancer.

Cortisol also completely changes body composition. You can have the same weight but less muscle and more fat as you get older. At low levels, it can depress your immune system which is the system that fights cancer.

How do we reduce stress and the corresponding cortisol production?

One of the principals of yoga is to control your breathing. Yoga teaching is to breath through it. You control breathing, you control hormones. It slows down adrenalin and cortisol. It allows the mind to relax, racing thoughts can pass. It's actually shown to lower heart rate and blood pressure. It is just slow, rhythmic breathing.

How important is strength in old age?

They've done studies in nursing homes of people who couldn't get out of a chair but, after using light weights, built up muscle mass. Part of my executive physical is a strength test, to prevent frailty, falls and fractures. Balance and stress are two important factors. Women are not strong with their hands and, if the core is not strong, they can easily fall and fracture a wrist. I use the BE SAFE program — Balance, Endurance, Strength and Flexibility Exercises.

Can people age well?

Some do and some don't. I have been on hikes with people in their 80s outpacing me. Like anything else, if you don't use it you lose it. We are shifting the paradigm. Our mothers and fathers were told to rest, don't do anything, you're too old. We're not like that.

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