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## How to live longer: good habits for a healthy life

When it comes to living a long life, genetics can play a part. We know that keeping healthy and fit, consuming fruit and vegetables and remaining active all help to keep us healthy. But what other healthy habits might help us to stick around a little bit longer? We look at some extra ways you can boost your chances of a long life.

"There is no 'magic' key to living a longer life - but we do know that certain factors in our genetic make-up and lifestyle can influence both the length and quality of our life." agrees GP Dr Zoë Watson. "Two of the biggest lifestyle factors which we know can heavily influence our health are [smoking](#) and alcohol consumption.

"Smoking is linked with an increased risk of many types of chronic diseases, including [cancer](#), heart disease, [stroke](#), COPD, peripheral vascular disease (peripheral arterial disease) - and many more chronic conditions.

"[Drinking alcohol](#) in excess also increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, several types of cancer and of course liver disease - amongst many other conditions. So, reducing smoking and drinking alcohol to occasional consumption or in moderation could lead to a significant improvement in both the length and quality of life," says Watson.

### 1. Eat more vegetable protein

These days, many of us are increasing the amount of protein we eat from vegetable sources, either due to [vegan or vegetarian diets](#), or due to the impact of meat production on the planet. And much of it is pretty healthy. But did you know that the 'stress' this kind of protein puts on our body can also be beneficial?

According to a [review](#) in 2019 our bodies are hard-wired genetically to become 'stressed' when we eat a lot of vegetables, as in days gone by this meant that hunts had gone wrong, and we were in danger. Eating more vegetable protein can induce a process called 'hormesis' in which stressors activate the genes that slow down cell growth and ageing.

## 2. Try a bit of HIIT

We all know that exercise is good for us, but have you ever tried a [HIIT session](#)? High impact interval training involves thirty seconds of full-on exercise followed by thirty seconds of rest for the duration of a workout. In 2017, a [study](#) found that this type of exercise helped to improve 'age-related decline in muscle mitochondria', a process which helps to generate chemical energy in cells. This helps to reduce adverse effects of ageing on the body.

## 3. Look on the bright side

It's time to turn that frown upside down. Why? Because according to a [study in 2019](#), optimism can help to increase our lifespan. While some aspects of being an optimist appear to be hereditary, our environment and the way we spend our time has an impact too. Feeling more positive and living longer? What's not to love!

## 4. Balance your body

Of course, nutritional balance is a great thing for our overall health. But have you thought about the other sort of balance? A [study](#) in 2012 discovered that being more flexible can mean living longer. Booking into a [yoga class](#) might do wonders for your ability to bend, but even simple exercises such as balancing on one foot at a time - perhaps while the tea brews - can help to improve your stability, flexibility and even mobility.

## 5. Nurture your relationships

A [Harvard study](#) released in 2017 discovered that one of the factors that kept participants healthy into old age was their level of satisfaction in their relationships. In fact, having positive close relationships and strong social bonds appeared to have a hand in delaying the kind of decline - both mental and physical - that comes with increasing age. So perhaps it's time to hook up with your bestie or arrange a date night with your other half.

## 6. Find your sleep 'sweet spot'

We've become accustomed to believing that eight hours of sleep a night is the holy grail for our health. But a [study](#) released in 2014 found that not only does seven hours of slumber seem to be better for our health, but that sleeping too much or too little can both increase the chance of early death. It's also important to maintain [regular sleep](#) patterns - going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time each day if you want to increase your chance of a longer life.

## 7. Have a giggle

Whether it's cracking a joke with friends or chuckling in front of a funny movie, we all know that laughter reduces stress and helps us to feel good. But having a good sense of humour could also help you to live longer. A [study](#) in 2016 discovered that women who scored high in the humour stakes had a 48% lower risk of death from any cause. Men who were similarly wired had a 74% lower chance of death from infection.

## 8. Drink coffee - and green tea

It's not to everyone's taste but having a cup of green tea could work wonders for your health. In fact, a [study](#) in 2015 discovered that micronutrients in this drink help to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, and vascular disease.

For those fonder of a daily coffee hit, don't worry. A 2021 [study](#) discovered that moderate consumption of this popular pick-me-up (1-6 cups a day) showed a 56% reduced risk of death.

## 9. Brush and floss

If you're complacent with your dental hygiene, it might be time to clean up your act. According to a [study](#) released in 2013 not only can [poor dental hygiene](#) impact your appearance and potentially increase the need for expensive or painful dental work, but it could also raise your risk of heart disease as a result of increased inflammation, and bacteria seeping into the bloodstream.

## 10. Get on your feet

If your job means you're desk-bound, or you spend more than six hours a day sitting, it's time to get on to your feet. Standing up and walking around are an important part of staying healthy and maintaining a healthy weight. A [study](#) published in 2018 revealed that if you sit for longer than six hours a day, you have a 19% increase in your risk of premature death, compared with those who sit for less than three hours a day.

We all know that life comes with no guarantees. But by being physically active and adjusting to a healthy lifestyle and diet - and by paying attention to the things thought to influence life expectancy - it may be possible to swing the odds of a living a long life more in our favour.

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