



Forever Young: The Science of Aging

Scientific American Editors

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Forever Young: The Science of Aging by the Editors of Scientific American

Today, an infant born in the US will probably live to see his or her 78th birthday, a 20- year-plus increase over the average lifespan a century ago. While living well into the 80s and 90s is becoming more and more attainable, how many more years can humanity expect to gain? The two main barriers are accumulated damage to cells and organs that occurs over time and age-related illnesses like cancer and Alzheimer's disease. Researchers are divided over where to pour their efforts, and in this eBook, Forever Young: The Science of Aging we take a look at what science knows—and what it's striving to learn—about the aging process.

Both genes and environment influence how long people live and how "well" they age, as discussed in Section 1, "A Matter of Time: The Aging Process." The eBook opens with "Why Can't We Live Forever," where author Thomas Kirkwood explains exactly why by way of his "disposable soma" theory. Other theories of how we age, including the role of telomeres, free radicals and caloric restriction, are discussed in subsequent sections. Recent studies have called into question long-held beliefs about the anti-aging benefits of antioxidants and reducing caloric intake. Though there are a number of age-related illnesses, few are so devastating as Alzheimer's disease, covered in its own section. While there's still no cure, a slew of clinical drug trials is underway. Finally, we examine the quest for longevity, featuring stories on both life-extension research and lifestyle choices. In particular, "Fit Body, Fit Mind?" looks at how to prevent age-related mental decline by staying physically fit and socially involved. So while there's no miracle pill on the horizon that will extend our lives to 150, we can certainly make the most of the years we do have.

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Jose Garcia:

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