



Buzz, Body & Bites

A newsletter for actively aging adults

Virginia Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Sciences

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The Difference Between Lifespan & Healthspan

Since the end of the Civil War, life expectancy at birth in the United States has doubled, from approximately 40 years in 1870 to almost 80 years of age today, which is remarkable! However, the number of those 80 years spent free of chronic or debilitating disease, known as healthspan, has not kept pace with an increased lifespan. Currently, 45% of people over the age of 65 and 21% of the 45-64 demographic has two or more chronic, non-communicable diseases – such as diabetes, heart disease, neurological diseases, etc. The prospect of living several decades with a chronic disease (or more than one) for a significant portion of the population is a multi-faceted challenge that may define healthcare in the 21st century. What is the cause of increased chronic disease that limits healthspan? The most likely culprit is age. Thanks to advances in sanitation, vaccines, antibiotics, food standards, etc. we now live long enough to develop a chronic disease. By the year 2050, current projections are that over a quarter of North America will be over the age of 65, compared to just 8% in 1950. Of the top ten causes of mortality in the US, 8 are chronic diseases that are most prevalent in individuals over the age of 65. While this sounds very foreboding, there is good news! Healthspan, like lifespan, can be extended. While our understanding of how to extend healthspan is still emerging, here are two strategies that are known to be effective:

1. Exercise /increased physical activity. People that are more physically active over their life maintain skeletal muscle mass with age, which helps them stay physically independent and have lower incidence of disease – increased healthspan. It's not too surprising then, given the current healthspan challenge discussed above, that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported in 2008 that only 16.4% of people over the age of 65 met physical activity guidelines.

2. Caloric Intake. Probably the most well studied and established paradigms in healthspan research is that limiting food intake, without causing malnutrition, increases healthspan. A simplified reason for this is that the processes your body uses to maintain function between meals are protective from the development of disease. As current statistics indicate 40% of the U.S. can be classified as obese, the current limits to healthspan are not that surprising.

So, what do we do with this information? Be encouraged! The means to extending healthspan is, to no small degree, in your hands. Yes, we need a better understanding of how to promote healthspan, but as a researcher (and someone that finds age creeping ever closer!) I take great encouragement that there exists tangible ways to promote healthspan at everyone's fingertips.

Contributed by: Joshua Drake, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Nutrition, Food, and Exercise, Virginia Tech

Risk Factors for a Faster Aging Heart

Key Distinction:

Lifespan - How long you live.

Healthspan - How well you live during your life.

Benefits of focusing on Healthspan:

- Enhanced quality of life
- Reduced disease burden
- Lower healthcare costs
- Increased emotional wellbeing

Risks of focusing only on Lifespan:

- Prolonged illness
- Loss of independence
- Reduced joy

Fresh Spring Quinoa and Chickpea Tabbouleh

Bring spring to the table with this colorful Tabbouleh featuring a variety of vegetables and herbs. There are many studies that show that eating an array of plants is beneficial for our health. Recipe from Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Dinner Tonight (see Resources)

Ingredients:

- 3 cups quinoa, cooked
- 1 15-ounce can chickpeas, drained
- 3 medium roma tomatoes, diced
- 1 cup cucumber, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 1/2 cup green onions, chopped
- 1/4 cup parsley, chopped
- 10 mint leaves, chopped

Dressing:

- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

Directions:

1. In a large bowl, mix the quinoa, chickpeas, tomatoes, cucumber, carrots, green onions, parsley, and mint.
2. In a small bowl, mix the lime juice, olive oil, garlic, cumin, salt, and pepper.
3. To the large bowl, pour the dressing mixture and stir until well mixed.

Triceps Dips

This simple exercise can strengthen your Abs even while sitting in front of the TV or computer!

1. Find a sturdy chair, steps, or even weights on the ground.
2. Position your hands close to your hips with legs straight (or bent for support/balance).
3. Dip your body while bending your elbows to engage your triceps muscles.
4. Hold for a second or more and return to starting position.
5. Do 2 sets of 5-10 repetitions.

Resources

American Heart Association-What is healthspan and how can you maximize yours?

www.heart.org/en/news/2025/01/14/what-is-healthspan-and-how-can-you-maximize-yours

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Dinner Tonight- <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu>

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