

THE MEN'S HEALTH

5-YEAR PLAN

Looking for longevity and vitality? We got you. Here's your full-body guide to extending your life by five years—and enhancing every single extra day.





**CHOICES,
CHOICES, CHOICES**

Living longer is within your grasp, if you make smarter decisions about your health and fitness.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FREDRIK BRODEN

LIVING PAST 100

is no longer just a goal of Silicon Valley CEOs. Twenty-seven percent of men wanted to live longer than a century, according to an Axios poll. An additional 47 percent said their answer would depend on life *quality*. That's where we're at, too. Who wants to live longer if you can't spend those extra years doing what you love?

Right now the average guy lives to be 75.1, up from 70.9 in 1982. (Pause for celebration.) Except that men continue to lag behind women by about five years, and men in marginalized communities face lower life expectancies than white men do. But here's the good news: Doctors are spearheading life-prolonging initiatives that look into your blood, your genome, and the inner workings of your cells. They're making leaps in brain health and cancer prevention, pinpointing how you can eat, exercise, and even think your way into living five years longer.

Not only might this new science extend your life, but those bonus years will be richer, healthier, and more fun—if you do the right things. On the pages that follow, longevity experts reveal what it takes to extend *and* enhance your life. That means defending against a host of nasty diseases, safeguarding your memory, fortifying your strength, and (*whoop!*) even improving your sex life. Heed their advice and you'll be given the gift of five extra years on the calendar.

Now, what are you going to do with them?

THE 6 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO A LONGER LIFE

Your science-based plan to extend your life span.

BY
**MARTY
MUNSON**

HOW WELL YOU AGE isn't about luck or just good genes. Living longer—and staying strong, agile, wise, and on top of things while you're at it—is actually about developing some strategies. You probably know about many of these already. Often what's standing between understanding what to do and doing it is wondering how much each move really matters or what to do first. So here we bring you the numbers. Seeing exactly how much each longevity step “counts” toward a younger body and a longer life makes it clear that in a world where it's hard to find an extra five minutes, a few little changes could end up buying you an extra five *years*.

“People have more control over aging than they think,” says Keith Roach, M.D. He's an associate attending physician at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, and he's spent years poring over studies that show the extent to which your lifestyle can affect your body's age. Along with Michael F. Roizen, M.D., chief wellness officer at Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Roach pioneered a way to take all this different research into account and quantify just how much each healthy thing you do can increase your longevity. Here's what kind of benefit a typical 45-year-old guy can expect to get from each move. If you're less healthy than the average guy, good news: Making these changes actually brings you greater longevity benefits.

STEP 1: TEAR INTO GOOD FOODS, TEAR OPEN FEWER PACKETS

**BENEFIT:
UPTO
3.6
YEARS**

FOR MANY REASONS—no judgment—the average American diet is full of red meat and processed foods, with very few fruits and vegetables. Many of us are getting as much as 57 percent of a day's calories from ultra-processed foods, which include packaged cookies and cakes, soft drinks, cold cuts, hot dogs, instant soups, and “reconstituted meat products” like chicken nuggets. Processing generally increases the shelf life of foods, but not of people.

Changing your diet to increase longevity is pretty straightforward. It doesn't require huge leaps, even if you love the convenience of processed foods. **Adding just one serving a week of both nuts and fatty fish, plus one serving each day of both fruits and vegetables, can turn back your body age by 2.5 years.** (These moves reduce your risk of heart attacks and strokes.)

Of course, “you need to consider what not to eat when choosing what to eat” so you don't gain weight, says Dr. Roach. One place to start: right-sizing your meat portions. If you eat a lot of red meat, committing to only one 3-ounce serving or less of red meat a day makes you up to 1.1 years younger. No deprivation needed—try packing your taco with more beans and guac and less carne asada, then stuffing it with taco-friendly produce like bell peppers, sauteed mushrooms, onions, and crunchy cabbage.

STEP 2: QUIT SMOKING

**BENEFIT:
UPTO
6.9
YEARS**

SMOKING INSULTS nearly every organ and system in your body. It's the leading cause of preventable death in the U. S. So **when you quit and relieve your body of the particles you inhale with every drag—along with the nicotine and the 7,000 other chemicals cigarettes deliver to you—the life-lengthening benefits kick in quickly.** Really quickly. In fact, your risk of a heart attack goes down within just 12 to 24 hours.

If you've smoked a pack a day for the past ten years, you're 5.6 years older than your chronological age, but quitting could net three years of that time back within 12 months. After ten years of not smoking, you could end up 1.3 years *younger* than your chronological age. The cumulative benefit of quitting can total 6.9 years.

Never smoked? You're already ahead of the game. Your body is about 3.3 years younger than that of the average American, says Dr. Roach.

STEP 3: MOVE, LIFT, AND DEFINITELY STRETCH

EXACTLY HOW MUCH

more life does exercise get you? That's a little hard to measure, because being active does so many things for so much of your body. If you start off sedentary, even a moderate amount of exercise gets you 1.4 years. But when you add in the downstream benefits—how it lowers blood pressure, decreases diabetes risk, reduces stress, and helps some people lose extra weight—you get more than double that number.

Even modest amounts of exercise can extend your life span. If you sit at your desk, get around by car, and use all the conveniences that let you take fewer than 4,000 steps a day, **walking—just walking—for 20 minutes per day can add**

a year to your life.

Throw in ten minutes of weightlifting per week, plus 30 minutes of stretching per week to increase your flexibility, and you get an additional 0.4 years. Stretching? Yup. **Basic stretches, especially for the legs, can scrub age from your arteries by making them less stiff, which could reduce your risk of a heart attack.** Try doing five minutes of stretching six days per week. Include posterior-chain stretches like toe touches and child's pose, then add upward dogs and calf stretches. Hold each stretch up to 15 seconds. Release and stretch again. For a deeper dive into the latest exercise and longevity science, see "Exercise to Build a Better Body for the Long Run" on page 70.

BENEFIT:
UP TO
2.8
YEARS

STEP 5: HAVE A DRINK, BUT REALLY ENJOY IT

WHEN IT COMES TO DRINKING

to your health, cheers. But be aware that the amount you're downing makes a difference, says Dr. Roach. **Having a little bit of alcohol—up to a drink a day, ideally with friends and family—is fine.**

Before you crack open that tallboy, though, keep in mind that health experts define a "drink" as a stingy 12 ounces of regular beer, five ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of spirits. Libations in those sizes may bring you cardiovascular benefits that reduce your body's age slightly (by about 0.1 year); the benefits may come partly from being in a social situation while you drink. (See Step 6.)

But as for keeping your body younger than your chronological age, there's no advantage to having a second pour. (Or a third.) In fact, downing more than a drink per day has been associated with a higher risk of death from all causes.

Game-day and two-fer-Tuesday drinkers, beware: For men, binge drinking just one to three times per month—that's having five or more drinks in a sitting—can add 3.5 years to your chronological age.

If you stop the overdrinking, you can turn that tally around. And it often happens pretty fast, since one of the reasons bingeing shortens your life so much is that it makes you more prone to dying in an accident.

If you're going to live 3.5 years longer, why not savor rather than binge your way through it?

BENEFIT:
UP TO
3.5
YEARS

STEP 4: TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF

"IF YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

is even a little high, getting it down is the biggest thing you can do to turn back your body's age," says Dr. Roach. Too much pressure against your blood-vessel walls—think fire-hose volume through a garden hose—is hell on your arteries. Consider all the organs that this pressure moves through and you can see why it also significantly drives up your risk of heart attacks, kidney failure, and strokes. **Going from borderline high blood pressure (140/90) to average (135/85) can make your body 3.3 years younger.** Take it from average to optimal (110/70) and you'll gain an additional 0.9 years.

How to do that: "If you're healthy and don't smoke, the best ways to lower blood pressure without drugs are to manage stress and decrease sodium," Dr. Roach says. Of the two, sodium's probably the easier place to start. Not everyone's blood pressure is salt sensitive. But if you cut back (Americans consume an average of 3,400 milligrams a day; the CDC suggests having less than 2,300) and if it turns out you are salt sensitive, you could see a drop in as little as a week.

The top source of sodium for Americans: bread and rolls, followed by pizza, cold cuts, and soup. Here are some easy swaps.

Instead of bread: Put PB on a banana or fill up on overnight oats or sweet potatoes.

Instead of cold cuts: Roast a chicken and try that in place of packaged deli meats.

Instead of regular canned soup: Try low-sodium options, and flavor them by bringing cayenne, hot sauce, garlic, oregano, and other herbs to the bowl.

BENEFIT:
UP TO
4.2
YEARS

STEP 6: CALL YOUR MOM (AND A FRIEND) THIS WEEK

GOING FROM a low social network (seldom seeing friends, refraining from group activities, avoiding regular social gatherings) to an ideal one (enjoying frequent and meaningful social contact, having friends and family whom you rely on and who rely on you) can earn you 1.7 more years because of the stress-reducing benefits to your heart health.

What a good social network looks like: It goes beyond a long contact list in your phone or a text every now and then to the people from trivia night. **To get the full longevity benefit from other humans, you need to have deep relationships—people you can talk with about important personal things.** You probably have more of

them in your life than you think. "Make a list of people you already know whom you really trust," recommends Yancy Wright, founder and CEO of the corporate-training company Alternavida Leadership. "Then when you're talking with them and they ask how you are, say, 'Do you really want to know?' If they say yes, then elaborate, even if you've had a bad day. If that's uncomfortable because you're just not a talker, do more activities with other people." Get outdoors if you can to take a hike or go for a bike ride. Try out a bouldering or rock-climbing excursion. "Being faced with challenges, especially in nature, opens us up," Wright says. "It's a natural tenderizer."

BENEFIT:
UP TO
1.7
YEARS