

HEARING HEALTH CARE NEWS™



MAY 2019

May is the gateway to both spring and summer and is finally upon us. It is a time when we seem to wake up happier, feel more optimistic and enjoy the extended daylight hours. Many see May as an opportunity to start up the search again for the “fountain of youth” as we tend to exercise and spend more time outdoors. One of the most puzzling questions facing medical scientists and clinicians is: “How do some of us live longer than others?” There have been numerous longitudinal “aging studies” that have given us insight as to what helps some of us live a longer, more enriched life.

This month we highlight the research from a recent study detailing the most important contributing factors for living a long and healthy life. While there are some obvious factors on the list, losing weight and quitting smoking. For example, you might be surprised to learn that the first and second most important lifestyle factors for living longer are: **social integration** and **close relationships with others**. And nothing is more integral to achieving these goals than proper hearing health care. After all, hearing is our lifeline to communicating and socializing with our family, loved ones, and community.

Centenarians, people who live to be 100 years young or more, embody a fairly small percentage of the total U.S. population. In fact, it is estimated that only 1 out of every 10,000 Americans are 100 years or older. While it is easy to make the assumption that perhaps these individuals are in some way genetically unique, genetics seems to only account for about 25 percent of how they live so long, whereas the other 75 percent is due to **lifestyle!**

So, what do we need to do to live to 100 or beyond?

What are we doing right?

What are we doing wrong?

The top two predictors of longevity pertain to features of your social life:

#1. Close Relationships. Your close relationships consist of the folks that you can call on for the following and more:

- an emergency loan when needed
- someone who will call the doctor for you when you aren't feeling well or will take you to the hospital
- someone who will sit with you if you are in the middle of an existential crisis or just simply in despair

These people, if you have them, are a strong predictor of how long you'll live.

#2. Social Integration. Social activity and integration with others are the amount of time you interact with people as you move through your day.

- Think about how many people do you talk to - both weak and strong bonds, not just the folks you are really close to but for example, the barista who makes your coffee every day.
- Do you talk to the mailman/woman?
- Do you talk to the man who walks by your house every day with his dog?
- Do you play bridge/poker?
- Do you attend a book club?

These types of interactions are one of the strongest indicators of how long you will live.

Physical contact and face-to-face interaction have a profound effect on our bodies. When surrounded by loved ones, our bodies release an entire torrent of neurotransmitters which protects us now and well into the future. Basically, simply making eye contact with others, shaking hands and giving a high-five is sufficient to release oxytocin. Oxytocin – a hormone produced by our body and found in our brains – is essential to increasing your level of trust and lowers your cortisol levels (**stress**). In addition, dopamine is produced which gives us a bit of a high and dulls pain. Dopamine is our body's naturally produced morphine.

Hearing and Aging

Why do females live longer than males? By the way, they do! A key reason is that females are much more likely to prioritize their face-to-face relationships over their lifetime. Recent research has shown that in-person relationships generate a natural force field against disease and decline,

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especially when it comes to hearing and Dementia. It's been shown time and time again that animals who have a core of contacts to spend time with show lower levels of stress and they live longer. The magic number seems to be 3 stable relationships.

The lowest rates of Dementia amongst individuals who are socially involved is due to the power of face-to-face contact. Hence, this is why **proper hearing health care as we age is so vital to our longevity**. It's extremely difficult to cultivate relationships when you can't understand what is being said. Face-to-face interaction delivers spectacular benefits, yet nearly one quarter of the population report that they have no one to talk to.

It is biologically essential to know that we belong. Properly treating hearing loss can set you on a path to building and maintaining in-person interaction with friends, family, and even strangers. Doing so will not only boost your immune system, but it will also send all those "feel-good" hormones rushing through your bloodstream and brain, and afford you the opportunity to live a longer life.

Helen Keller is credited with saying, *"Blindness separates us from things, but deafness separates us from people."*



So, how are we to live longer lives if we leave hearing loss untreated?

Check back next month for more on our "Hearing Health Care" series to learn about how hearing is the key to an active and healthy lifestyle as we age.

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