9 Biggest Longevity Myths to Stop Believing

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The longevity industry is selling you a story. Research sets the record straight.

Longevity is often packaged as a luxury product: Red-light panels, pricey supplements, and members-only clubs suggest that a five-figure buy-in will meaningfully extend your lifespan. We've been told that living to 100 requires full-fledged optimization at every turn. But when you look at the data, much of what passes for longevity wisdom is either overstated or more nuanced than we've been led to believe. If we're serious about adding years—healthy ones, at that—it's important to separate fact from fiction and look beyond the buzz. Ahead, we're unpacking some of the most prevalent myths about longevity and uncovering what the science actually shows.

9 Biggest Longevity Myths to Stop Believing

Myth 1: "Your genes are your destiny"

People have long assumed that genetic risk factors dictate how your future will unfold. This is in part due to the high visibility of inherited diseases, and further compounded by the fact that families often share habits and environmental risk factors, further aligning their outcomes.

The reality: Genes are only part of the equation. Having a family history of high cholesterol or a genetic predisposition to Alzheimer's, for example, doesn't mean you'll follow suit. Previous twin studies suggested that genes might account for 20 to

25% of lifespan, while a new **landmark study** suggests that longevity is 50% heritable. Even at that higher number, heritability isn't a life sentence. It's simply a statistic.

Importantly, your genes don't exist in a vacuum. Even if your family history makes you more susceptible to certain diseases or an accelerated aging process, your lifestyle and environment still shape how those genes are expressed. Diet, physical activity, sleep quality, metabolic health, and social connection all interact with gene expression through **epigenetic mechanisms** (think inflammaging, DNA methylation, and microRNA expression). This means that how you live can influence how your genes behave over time.

Myth 2: "There's a single best diet for longevity"

Many people believe that the Mediterranean diet is the single best for longevity—and in many ways that enthusiasm is founded. It's the most-studied dietary pattern in the world with **decades of data** supporting its link to lowered rates of chronic illness. So what's the problem?

The reality: While the Mediterranean diet is well worth trying, there's no single best diet for longevity. (New research on the **Nordic diet** serves as a perfect example of why we should keep an open mind.) While it's tempting to commit to a single dietary pattern that promises healthier years, the truth is that there's wiggle room for what and how you eat.

Take, for instance, the Blue Zones. Okinawans focus on sweet potatoes and soy, Nicoyans on beans and corn, and Ikarians on greens and olive oil. Sardinians wake up with a shot of espresso and enjoy wine with meals, while the Seventh-Day Adventists in Loma Linda avoid caffeine and alcohol outright. Despite the differences in what makes it onto their plates, these communities are still amongst the longest-living folk in the world.

That said, some broad dietary patterns *do* show **stronger outcomes for longevity**. Most diets worth watching emphasize whole foods—including plenty of plants, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats—while minimizing processed meats, ultraprocessed foods, sodium, saturated fats, and sugar. As you make your own meal plan, just know that you have flexibility within these broader guidelines.

Myth 3: “You can cancel out a poor diet”

On the topic of diet, some people believe that enough cardio, cold plunges, and supplements can “cancel out” their less-than-stellar dietary choices. Fast food, sweets, and ultraprocessed snacks don’t seem as bad if you have the rest of your regimen locked in.

The reality: Food is foundational. What you put into your body, day in and day out, has cumulative effects over time. And while there’s no single diet that’ll guarantee longevity, there are many eating habits that are linked time and time again to poorer health outcomes.

For instance, high sugar, trans fats, and low fiber intake have all been shown to **accelerate aging**. In **one observational study**, high consumption of ultraprocessed foods increased risk of all-cause mortality by 40%. Meanwhile, limiting your intake of red and processed meats and refined grains may also play a role in **extending life expectancy**.

While the occasional indulgence won’t wreck your diet—and is even encouraged, as food is meant to be enjoyed—aim to prioritize healthy foods as much as possible. The 80-20 eating plan (i.e., eating nutrient-dense whole foods 80% of the time and being more flexible for the remaining 20%) is a solid approach to prevent feelings of deprivation and encourage long-term healthy eating habits.

Myth #4: “Good longevity protocols are expensive”

Your social media algorithm is designed to convince you that everything you want in life is just a purchase away. In the context of longevity, that may look like a double-digit supplement stack, the latest-edition wearable, or a five-figure mattress. Some people swear by these products, perpetuating the notion that longevity is accessible only if your pockets are deep enough.

The reality: No matter what influencers and podcasters say, you can’t buy your way to longevity. As cardiologist and longevity expert Dr. Eric Topol **previously told Super Age**, you don’t need the latest gadgets and trending biohacks. A handful of daily habits—moving your body, protecting your sleep, eating real food, managing inflammation, and sustaining good relationships—can add up to 10 healthy years to your life.

Supplements and saunas might be nice add-ons, but don’t sleep on the low-cost, high-reward basics. You don’t need constant optimizations. What you need is consistency.

Myth #5: “Your metrics matter above all else for a long, healthy life”

Constantly checking your Fitbit to see if you’ve clocked 10,000 steps? Live by the gospel of your Oura ring? Stress over the out-of-range numbers on your labs? Plenty of people mistakenly believe that health data is the only meaningful benchmark of health, fitness, and longevity.

The reality: To a certain degree, data can predict health and guide your daily rituals, but there’s more to your longevity story than numbers and metrics alone. It turns out that your relationships can also be medicinal.

In fact, the **Harvard Study of Adult Development**, a decades-long longitudinal study, found that healthy relationships promoted the best outcomes for a long life,

well-lived. Not biomarkers. Not wealth. Not your weight. Just close, steady ties sustained over time. “Good relationships keep us happier, healthier, and help us live longer,” the researchers concluded.

Relationships foster curiosity, empathy, and connection and add richness and meaning to our lives. Strong social connections **may also be anti-inflammatory** and positively impact your nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. Meanwhile, chronic loneliness and social isolation have been found to be **as risky as smoking and obesity** for morbidity and mortality.

Do what you can to engage with others as much as possible. Break bread with friends. Grab coffee with a co-worker. Strike up a conversation at the gym. Consistent connection can make all the difference whether or not your wearable can track it.

Myth #6: “More exercise is always better”

Physical activity plays a sizable role in the longevity equation. **One review** suggests that all-cause mortality is reduced by as much as 35 percent in active (versus inactive) individuals, and that working out regularly is associated with an increased life expectancy by as much as 6.9 years. These points considered, you might be led to believe that more is always merrier—that a longer life sits just on the other side of a more rigorous workout routine.

The reality: Yes, exercise is crucial: The **Centers for Disease Control (CDC)** says that active people tend to live longer and have a reduced risk of major health problems including heart disease, obesity, type-2 diabetes, and certain cancers. However, too much exercise is counterproductive—and potentially even dangerous.

One study suggests that 2.5 to 5 hours a week of moderate-to-vigorous exercise—the higher ends of which exceed the CDC’s guidelines for physical activity—will offer maximal benefits. Much more than that, and the longevity curve

eventually plateaus.

It's also possible to overdo it. That same study found that frequently **excessive endurance exercise** (like training for too many marathons) could negatively impact cardiovascular health. Though the data on heart risk is still evolving, injury risk and general wear-and-tear are well-established risk factors.

The key takeaway is that for most people, consistency beats intensity or extreme frequency. Don't neglect the importance of rest days, and allow yourself adequate time to recover from strenuous activity.

Myth #7: "Longevity is primarily about lifespan"

Per **the CDC**, men in the United States have a life expectancy of 76.5 years, while women average 81.4 years. Some biohackers will do anything to hike those numbers: Restrict their diets. Buy into cutting-edge gadgets and machines. Neglect relationships in the pursuit of life evermore.

The reality: It's one thing to live a long life, and something else entirely to live a long and *healthy* one. Healthspan—the number of healthy years free from chronic disease, disability, and significant cognitive decline—should always be front and center.

The good news is that decline isn't inevitable, especially when you prioritize your health on a daily basis over the course of your lifetime. Be empowered by the fact that so much of your health is in your hands. Mind what you eat, how much you move, don't smoke, and maintain social connections. Each has the power to add more life to your years—and a long life without vitality isn't the win we're after.

Myth #8: "Cold plunges (and other longevity hacks) are proven longevity tools"

Cold plunges are all the rage these days. And as the trend's popularity grows, so does interest from the scientific community. Studies have shown that cold water immersion may have beneficial effects on everything from **stress and immunity** to **muscle soreness and post-workout fatigue**—not to mention **brain function and mood**. You may assume that means a daily dunk could hold the key to optimal health.

The reality: It's easy to simplify these findings into the belief that cold plunges are a meaningful way to extend lifespan, but research on cold water immersion is still in its infancy. Additionally, cold plunges are fundamentally hormetic, meaning a low-dose of exposure may trigger positive adaptations, while a high-dose of exposure can be downright dangerous. The jury's still out on if the physiological effects actually translate into meaningful human longevity gains.

To understand what a genuinely *robust* body of evidence looks like, consider this 5-year Finnish **study** on **sauna use**. Among more than 2,300 men, those who reported having a sauna bathing session four to seven times per week had a 40% lower risk of cardiovascular death and a 50% lower risk of fatal coronary heart disease compared to once-a-week users — findings that held up even after researchers controlled for exercise, smoking, and alcohol. Follow-up research linked frequent sauna use to a 61% lower stroke risk and a 66% lower dementia risk. Cold plunges may eventually earn that kind of credibility, but the research simply isn't there yet.

What's less ambiguous when it comes to cold plunges are the acute health risks. According to the **American Lung Association**: "Cold shock can trigger rapid, uncontrolled breathing or hyperventilation, especially in individuals living with chronic lung disease, which can lead to dizziness or fainting. If this happens unsupervised, the person is at risk of drowning."

They further note that cold water constricts the blood vessels, increasing blood pressure and making the heart work harder. "For this reason, people with an existing heart condition are particularly vulnerable to adverse side-effects, so most healthcare

providers advise against cold plunges. Hypothermia and frostbite are also always a risk," the health authority says.

More broadly speaking, it's right to be skeptical of other trending biohacks that enter the zeitgeist. Any time you're considering a new addition to your routine—especially if money changes hands—look past the marketing messages and dig deeper. Do long-term studies conducted on humans (and designed with integrity) support a company's claims? Are there any side effects in small print? Is a placebo effect at play? And most importantly, does your doctor agree that the benefits outweigh the risks? Longevity is built on what's science-backed and sustainable, not what's sensational.

Myth #9: "Your longevity protocol needs to start early"

Perhaps you've been a smoker your entire adult life. Maybe you've never lifted weights or made a healthy, home-cooked meal before. It's easy to assume that it's impossible to turn things around and move your health in a brighter direction.

The reality: No matter how old you are, it's never too late to modify your habits and improve your health. **One study** found that quitting smoking at age 75 has a 14.2% chance of adding at least one year to your life. If you quit at age 65, you have a 24% chance of extending your lifespan. Quit at 55? You can avoid an average loss of 3.4 years.

Establishing other health habits late in life can be similarly beneficial. For instance, even if you suffer from sarcopenia, lifting weights in older age may **enhance muscle strength and physical function**, allowing you to stay vital and independent for longer. And in **one study** of over 5,000 adults aged 80 and older, a healthy lifestyle—including not smoking, exercising consistently, and sticking to a diverse diet—was found to be just as important in these later years to promote longevity.

As you look to your future, don't let your past define you. Know that you can take

positive action today that can work wonders for tomorrow. And just as importantly, don’t be taken in by viral longevity myths. Not when we’ve got the science and know-how to make more informed choices for our health.

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