

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Sunday School

What Will Help You Live Longer?

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What can you do to lengthen your life?

We see and hear dozens of sales pitches about the ‘fountain of youth’ every day: vitamins, exercise gadgets, skin potions, vacations; you name it. What really enhances length of life? What are the factors that contribute the least, and the most, to the longevity of one’s physical life?

Before we get into this, let’s connect with a critical concept found in God’s Word. It’s something God did that preserved, and lengthened, a lot of lives. It lays down a foundational theme in most of what God does for mortals. Think back to when God approached Abraham and told him that there will be a covenant created between God and Abram’s lineage:

Genesis 17: 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty. Walk before Me and be blameless. 2I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.”

V 7 “I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”

V 9 God also said to Abraham, “You must keep My covenant—you and your descendants in the generations after you. 10 This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you, which you are to keep: Every male among you must be circumcised. 11 You are to circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and this will be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 Generation after generation, every male must be circumcised when he is eight days old, including those born in your household and those purchased from a foreigner—even those who are

not your offspring. 13Whether they are born in your household, or purchased, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh will be an everlasting covenant.

God's Laws And Long Life

OK, so what does circumcision have to do with length of life? Up until the infancy of modern medicine, we had no even ask. However, as early medical science began to study the occurrence of cervical cancer in women, a pattern emerged.

Bear in mind that humans have only been bathing on a regular basis during the past hundred years - in the US. Many cultures....never. As doctors began studying data on cervical cancer, it seemed that most every culture of women was equally afflicted, except Jewish women. The ONLY difference between Jewish women and other cultures was circumcision. Doctors began studying this phenomenon and found that the bacteria harbored by the foreskin is directly related to cervical cancer, HPV and other diseases.

Think of the millions of Jewish women through history who have been spared these deadly diseases simply because of a religious rite; circumcision. Was this just an accidental benefit? Did God only want a generational, physical, sign of His covenant, and this was a fluke in our favor? Or, is God demonstrating that his instructions, his laws, etc., are good in many ways?

Psalm 34:7 "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear (respect) Him, and he delivers them. 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!"

Think of the Jewish dietary laws in the Old Testament. Abstaining from eating animals that scavenge, or filter water, or eat other dead animals was not only a form of devotion to God's law, it prevented sickness and disease LONG BEFORE anyone knew what pathogens were.

Leviticus 1:1 The LORD spoke again to Moses and Aaron, telling them, 2 "Say to the Israelites, 'Of all the beasts of the earth, these ones you may eat: 3 You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud.

4 But of those that only chew the cud or only have a divided hoof, you are not to eat the following: The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you. 5 The rock badger, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you.

6 The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you. 7 And the pig, though it has a split hoof completely divided, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. 8 You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

9 Of all the creatures that live in the water, whether in the seas or in the streams, you may eat anything with fins and scales.

10 But the following among all the teeming life and creatures in the water are detestable to you: everything in the seas or streams that does not have fins and scales. 11 They shall be an abomination to you; you must not eat their meat, and you must detest their carcasses. 12 Everything in the water that does not have fins and scales shall be detestable to you.

Leviticus goes on to describe other animals; birds, reptiles, insects, etc., that are fit for consumption and those that are to be “considered detestable.” If you have ever traveled in certain areas of the globe, where the sewage and waste remediation, etc. we might take for granted, are a rarity, you may understand. Though a crab or a bottom feeding fish may be caught in a stream, they may have been living in absolutely filthy water with sewage runoff, etc. So, for God to put such restrictions on the Jewish diet was NOT ONLY a way for His people to live out their devotion to Him, it was far healthier than pagan practices.

Think of the four young men captured by the Babylonians in Daniel ch 1. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted them trained for royal service and ordered them to be given food and wine from the royal tables.

Daniel 1: 8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”

11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Everything God Tells Us Is GOOD

God does not just make random rules for us to follow. Everything God has laid down in His word is beneficial to our minds, bodies, spirits and our families. Internalizing God’s Word and obeying Him in love yields innumerable benefits. And, why not? He made us! He tells us to do what is good for us.

James 1:1-8 “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Ephesians 5:31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;”

Romans 5:8 “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

A Recent Study On Length Of Life

With that as a backdrop, let’s look at a recent scientific study on the top ten influencers of longevity of life.

Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a researcher at Brigham Young University addressed this question in a series of studies of tens of thousands of middle-aged people. Her work looked at every aspect of their lifestyles; diet, exercise, marital status, smoking, drinking, how often they went to the doctor, etc.

She and her colleagues recorded the data and waited seven years to see how the subjects were faring. Of the people still alive, after seven years, what life influencers had reduced their chances of dying the most? Let’s look at the results going from the least powerful predictor to the strongest predictor of long life.

Predictor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Clean air	XXX						
Hypertension RX	XXXXX	X					

Clean air is the least, and hypertension medications did not rate very high. However, they are in the top ten, so they are important.

Predictor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Clean air	XXX						
Hypertension RX	XXXXX	X					
Lean/overweight	XXXXX	XXXXX	X				
Exercise	XXXXX	XXXXX	X				

Now we see how diet and exercise factor in. Again, important, but not the strongest influencers.

Predictor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Clean air	XXX						
Hypertension RX	XXXXXX	X					
Lean/overweight	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X				
Exercise	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X				
Cardiac Rehab	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X				
Flu vaccine	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XX				
Quit alcohol	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X			
Quit Smoking	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX			

Cardiac rehabilitation is a strong influencer, but it may rate this low because not everyone in the study group needed it. How interesting; regular flu vaccines are more important than the previous influencers. And, of course, NOT poisoning your body with alcohol and tobacco are fairly high on the list.

Here was the surprise: the strongest influencers for long life are actually social:

Predictor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Clean air	XXX						
Hypertension RX	XXXXXX	X					
Lean/overweight	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X				
Exercise	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X				
Cardiac Rehab	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X				
Flu vaccine	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XX				
Quit alcohol	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	X			
Quit Smoking	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX			
Close Relationships	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XX		
Social Integration	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX	XXX		

Close Relationships is defined as having someone in your life who is not only a good and trusted family member or friend; it's someone who knows you well and with whom you communicate often. They may also be someone who will loan you money in an emergency, call the doctor for you, sit with you if you're sick, take you to the hospital, etc.; someone who is THERE to help in times of despair.

Social Integration is defined by how much you interact with people. How many people do you talk with daily? This includes weak bonds; talking with your mailman, visiting with a neighbor, talking with a cashier, etc. Strong bonds include; your spouse, close family members, church members, a best friend, social clubs, etc.

In the early 90s, I watched a speech on the topic of how much LESS social Americans have become since the 1960s. The speaker used as an example; Bowling. Standing before a crowd of about 2,000 attendees, he asked of the audience how many of their parents went bowling at least once per month. Most of their hands went up. Then, he asked how many of those present EVER went bowling at all. Only a couple of hands went up.

He shared that; the number of bowling alleys in America nearly doubled from 6,600 in 1955 to 11,000 by 1963. Over the same period, the number of people bowling in leagues increased from less than three million to seven million. (Compare that with about 3,976 bowling alleys remaining in 2013, and less than 1 million US bowlers in leagues today)

His point was that bowling is a social activity. Friends meet with friends on a regular basis to play a game and enjoy one another's interaction. His observation was that we, as a society, have become much less social and more isolated. He was not connecting this to health, but rather, to the fabric of our society becoming weaker.

He used additional examples such as; the neighbors you see only coming and going, but never meeting. He mentioned how parking in front of the TV had replaced many social activities. Other social activities have also been on the decline, such as social dancing, organized social events, social club memberships, book clubs, etc.

The lack of strong relationships and social interactions can lead to feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and despair. How much greater might these feelings be when one reaches their later years?

In the 1980s, we had as neighbors, an 80 yr old couple. They were the warmest, sweetest people I think I've ever met. The wife had been born in the stone farm house less than a quarter mile away. Any time I walked into their house, there

was coffee, pie and a sit-down conversation. One day I was visiting and the phone rang. She got up saying; "Oh, I just hate that thing!" Afterward, I asked her why she hates her phone.

She explained that, when she was younger, they would simply load up in the wagon and visit folks. There was no calling ahead. When you showed up, folks were happy you showed up and you spent time together. She said her kids now use the phone instead of visiting. "I'd like it out of my house" she said.

How many parents, today, wish their kid would just text them now and again??

God Wants Strong Relationships

If we refer back to the findings of Ms. Lunstad's study, we see that ALL of the factors that impact longevity are important. None is unimportant. They all contribute to one's health. However, the two that provide the greatest positive influence are relationships and social integration. How interesting, if we put these two factors into the context of God's word. First, we recognize that God wants to have a STRONG RELATIONSHIP with you:

John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the father, full of grace and truth."

Zephaniah 3:17 "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Ephesians 1:11 "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,"

John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Matthew 11:28-29 “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. “

God has given us his first institution; Marriage. Within the marital relationship is the strongest and closest of all human relationships:

Genesis 2:24 “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Proverbs 18:22 “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”

Can this “favor from the Lord” be interpreted as BOTH the obedience to God’s institution (our love to Him), and the benefits and blessings a spouse brings (our love one to another)?

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

God’s Word gives us many examples of friendship and its benefits:

1 Samuel 18:1-3 “After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king’s son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David. From that day on Saul kept David with him and wouldn’t let him return home. And Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself.”

Proverbs 12:26 “The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray.”

Proverbs 17:17 “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”

Proverbs 27:5-6 “An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.”

The Bible is also strong on the fellowship between believers:

Hebrews 10: 24 “And let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. 25 Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

John 13: 34 “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

Proverbs 27: 17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

God is our Father, our creator. He wants good things for us. I'm a father; if I make my child eat vegetables, or keep them from running into the street or from dating a drug addict, I'm not imposing punitive constraints on them. I'm protecting them out of love. You do the same with your kids. God does the same with us. Even when discipline is needed, it is from love:

Hebrews 12: 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not take lightly the discipline of the Lord, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastises every son He receives.” 7 Endure suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

So, let us look at the “guard rails” God puts in our lives as benefits, as well as ways to honor our creator. God not only tells us **not** to do that which may harm us, He tells us **to do** that which will bring benefit to ourselves and others...and, often, He provides multiple benefits in the same instruction!

Let us take full advantage of the close relations and social interactions that make for a longer, healthier, happier life for all involved. Science shows it's one of the healthiest things you can do, and God's Word, the Bible, bears it out.