**Living Longer!**

A couple of years ago I picked up Time Magazine because of the front cover article entitled “The Science of Living Longer.” As expected it was chalk full of good information, interesting tidbits of knowledge and research stating the facts as they know it.

Life expectancy has improved tremendously over the last number of years. The article states that an average of three months is gained each year in life expectancy at birth, in a historical analysis of the world’s highest-life-expectancy countries. This number has been constant for more than 150 years. In fact, a Danish scientist and his colleagues have calculated that more than half the children in the “developed world” will be around for their 100th birthday.

We’re fortunate that we live in a country where we have safe water to drink, excellent hygiene, advanced medical opportunities and access to a variety of healthier foods and nutrients.

Genetics are about 30% of the equation with regards to our chances of becoming a centenarian, which leaves 70% due to lifestyle habits, general health and other issues. Scientists all over the world are trying to figure out how to influence our genes by studying “centenarians” with their genetic makeup and their lifestyle habits.

One of the most interesting case studies highlighted in the Time Magazine article is “will eating less lead to living longer?” Apparently, restricting calories extends animal life, so doctors want to know if going hungry could extend human life as well. Decades of calorie-restriction studies involving organisms ranging from microscopic yeast to rats to rhesus monkeys have shown just that, extending life spans of the semi-starved by as much as 50%. The amazing part of the study with the monkeys is that the primates had less diabetes, heart disease, brain disease and cancer then their well-fed counterparts.

The theory is that a state of slight hunger acts as a mild but constant stressor that makes an organism stronger and more resistant to the ills of aging. Taking in fewer calories also slows metabolism, and some data indicates that humans with a slower metabolism live longer. There are even some populations of people, where longevity is prevalent, and researchers think that it’s due to their secluded lifestyles, restricted caloric intake and (possibly) healthier living environments.

Anytime you go on a diet, you stand a good chance of lowering your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, risk of diabetes and other health woes along with overall body weight. All of this translates into extra years. Calorie restriction was defined in this case study as 25-30% fewer calories than normal but still containing essential nutrients, which research also shows to be a key factor in the longevity equation. Eating healthy!

Another side of the longevity equation that this article talked about, is being able to afford health care if life spans continue to increase. An example: eliminating smoking may boost Medicare costs $293 billion because people will live longer. But given current trends, the life-span boost from the steadily falling tobacco use may be erased by our steadily rising obesity rates. So maybe the 25-30% reduction in calories is the answer!

The article concluded with tips for living to 100. “Longevity is not about living without disease. The goal is to recover from them faster and better.” The goal is to make our long lives desirable and functional; we don’t want to live extra years struggling and frail.

We have control of that 70% of lifestyle control. Here’s what the article recommends;

Daily rigorous physical activities to strengthen bones, heart, improve balance (which is critical in preventing falls and injuries) and overall health.

Get 15 minutes of sun every day (or take 1,000 IU of vitamin D) and take 1,000 mg of calcium. Vitamin D deficiency is possibly a factor in our high levels of cancer, autoimmune ailments and heart disease.

Choose foods that look the same way as they came out of the ground. Whole foods support the natural rejuvenating processes of the body.

Sleep more than seven hours a day.

Have a purpose; your family, your work, your community. There may be no better longevity booster than simply wanting to be here.