

The Aging Paradox

There is a fixation on the actual number people have as their age. It is as if there are strict parameters you have to follow physically if you belong to a certain age group. Many people succumb to this belief to the point of losing hope to what can be accomplished physically based on the number you are at. In addition there is a belief that aging means giving up your youth. I hope to point out this simply is not so and there are many common mistakes made that aren't realized that are well within your control to avoid. Your body doesn't have to age as most people think!

There appears to be a common theme as people progress from childhood to adulthood. When young the priorities are playing games and having fun; schoolwork is there and most of us apply ourselves to it enough to learn and grow - it is rarely the top priority. Only in the eyes of the parents is this a priority so we can grow up to have "successful" careers. We take for granted that playing, having fun, and enjoying the things we like to do are just as important. These are things that help us develop our physical health and allow us to continue to enjoy the activities we love.

As we move into adulthood the emphasis shifts from playing games and having fun to focusing on developing our careers - as it should be. Somewhere along the line we forget the need to have recreation and activities in our lives, now known as "exercise", and accept the fact that we are aging. So now with all the emphasis being placed on work, paying the bills, and being successful we give up our youth for financial advancement. Our bodies become sacrificed to stress and the daily grind until one day it is realized that we don't like where we are physically. Financial advancement is not a bad thing of course, but there are simple things you can do to keep your health in check. Now as you see initially we gave up our bodies for financial gain, but eventually come full circle to give back financial gain for the bodies we gave up. This is the common theme that is not seen until it happens. It can become quite expensive to pay for our health once it is diminished. Whether your paying for a knee replacement, hip replacement, back surgery, bariatric surgery, eating plans, exercise equipment, etc, it all becomes something that could have been avoided. It is not always easy to see.

From a scientific look you can easily see what a normal week will do to your physical age. In order to do this I'll have to explain some basic physiology. Your body is meant to function optimally from a neutral body position. The easiest way to explain neutral body position is to refer to what most people call "good posture". In this position all your joints have full range, pain free, as they should. All of your muscles are in balance to one another and coordinate effectively to create a well orchestrated movement around each joint. Injury or joint complications will rarely occur because there is nothing abnormal to cause this - everything is in balance. When we enjoy any recreation we expose our bodies to a large range of movement developing your motor units evenly. When we repetitively expose our bodies to un-neutral positions and movements this is where the aging process begins.

Now let's look at very simply what normally happens with a sedentary job. Your shoulders for example become rounded forward as you hunch doing paper work or typing. Over years this position predominates the standard neutral body position your physiology prefers. With your shoulders in this new position your joints have an altered movement pattern, your muscles have an altered strength curve and their attempt to coordinate a regularly normal movement at your shoulder joint have been altered. This will inevitably lead to shoulder impingement, decreased range of motion, and most common injury. This is but a mere example of why you have decrease function over time. On a side note I can't tell you how many women have been upset with me after describing what high heels do to your hips and spine when you wear them excessively. Your body is a very particular machine and decreased function will lead to decreased strength which in turn affects your ability to exercise, enjoy any recreational activity, or even complete simple daily tasks. It's a downward spiral unless correct action is taken. It is preferred that action be taken along the way to counter act the negative stress on your body.

This can be accomplished by obeying some of the simple things you learned as a kid. Sit up straight, eat your vegetables, go to bed on time, and leave enough time to play. Taking care of your body just means to try to expose it to as little negative stress as possible. If you work at a desk try to sit up straight. Your work never ends and it will always be there, so take 30 minutes to eat and fuel your body. Don't let yourself get to the end of your day starving because you know what will happen. You don't have to exercise an hour a day take the opportunity to fit some exercise into your day a minute at a time. Stand up and stretch. Take the stairs. It might seem silly, but I've even had someone do 10 pushups every hour to get the blood flowing. The list of things you can do are endless and don't think they are insignificant. There is a bonus to these actions. Not only will it affect your health, you would be surprised what it does to your productivity.

This information is not to convince you to forget your responsibilities and exercise every day. It is to show that even the simplest of things can make a huge impact to your health over time. Aging has to do with what you expose your body to every day, and any attempt to create balance between the good and the bad can go a long way. Weight gain and diminished health don't happen over night. Small steps taken along the way is just enough to avoid the point you get to when you realize your health has gone downhill. Everyone wants to maintain their youth, losing it doesn't have to be a part of growing older. It is easy not to believe this, but I have seen many cases where someone in their 60's has a fitness level equal to someone in their 20's, and in the same token there are many in their 20's who's fitness level equates to someone in their 60's. I have seen a 70 year old man sprint like a college athlete and many other similar cases that show proof of how you can keep your body young as long as you take care to do so.

Bottom line, your body is at your mercy. Your physiology is extremely adaptable and as long as you care to make it a priority you can do what you want to it at any age. The number is an insignificant factor in the equation.