

## Wellness after Fifty

Hello fiftyoids and half-doners from the snowfields of North Carolina. Cold weather and mounting Catholic guilt has moved me to send a message to friends and family crossing this age landmark. I don't pretend to be an expert in longevity but a good healthy fear of loss of function, 25 years of practicing oncology, and natural curiosity has made this topic one of my hobbies. What I include here is not direct medical advice and should be incorporated into your physician recommendations. I confess that I practice everything included here and have researched it thoroughly. Unfortunately, we will all experience some "mischievous" in the next 20 to 40 years, but selfishly I would like to spend quality time with you in the years to come and hope this type of formula will enable those opportunities.

**Rule One- You have some control**- "Knowledge is power" (but one must act on it). What you do in your home, away from the doctor can enable you to avert 70-80 percent of chronic disease (heart disease, strokes, diabetes and cancer). Two studies have independently confirmed that: 1) smoking avoidance, 2) mild or minimal alcohol intake, 3) eating 5 or more fruits or vegetables per day, 4) exercising 30 minutes per day 4 or more times per week, and 5) having a BMI (Body Mass Index) of 25 or less (called the Magical 5) will steer you away from 75% of the chronic disease listed above. Ironically only 3 percent of the American study population had all five of those listed even when the criteria of exercise and diet were loose. The German population had a 9 percent group that had all 5, if the BMI was increased to 30 instead of 25. You can google BMI and plug in your numbers. As a 5'11 guy I have to weigh 175 or less to meet my BMI of 25 or less.

**Rule 2-Vascular disease** (Stroke, MI, peripheral vascular disease, blood clots, impotency) will impact 2/3rds of us even though it may not be life ending. Why not make some changes now to enable better function in our seventies and eighties rather run the risk of a compromised life. If one is at high risk for Coronary Artery Disease, then manage blood pressure, weight, sugars, and cholesterol aggressively. If one has no screaming risk factors though, I suggest making some accepted moves to delay vascular disease with some safe medications. I use a coated 81 mg Aspirin (if one has no history of bleeding ulcers or gastritis) each day with breakfast, take 600mg of Red Yeast Rice in the morning which serves as a low dose statin substitute (works the same way on lipids), take 4000 IU of vitamin D per day (helps maintain lower BP, but also reduces some cancer risk, aids bone health, reduces muscle fatigue and cramping) which is much more than previously recommended by authorities. I have listened to two lectures by national experts lately and yes the 4000 IU dose is correct and this may only keep you normal once you are up to normal (30 to 100ng/ml on blood test). You will notice a great benefit to getting this up in the 50 ranges, and make sure your wife is taking the same, and your kids 2000 IU as well. It is hard to get toxic on this vitamin unless you spend a lot of time in the sun and never cover up. Finally the only prescription drug I use but in low dose is a 500mg

Niaspan at night. This works on all the cholesterol and triglyceride units in a favorable way and is one of the oldest drugs used. This is niacin or Vitamin B-3 and is over the counter if one buys it in the short acting preparation, the Niaspan is a slow release and has less flushing. The main side effect in some is a hot flash feeling like your skin is on fire. I have had this twice and it happens more often if alcohol is on board, so I skip it if I have had some wine or drinks. You may ask why not just take a statin? I would if I had a real cholesterol problem, but I wanted to avoid the risk of muscle cramps and weakness that can come with statins (zocor, mevacor, lipitor) and avoid the necessary blood monitoring of liver function. The last issue is fish oil or omega 3 fatty acids. These are over the counter products are now proven to help lipids, reduce inflammation, aid nerve function, reduce dry eyes and dry mouth and more. I get plenty of these in my morning shake (walnuts and flax seed), so I don't take any directly but I would suggest adding 2-3 capsules of a good brand if there is not intentional intake in diet.

**Rule 3- Cancer will impact half of us and 1 in 3 may die from it.** The major worries of a non-smoker population (if still smoking than one needs to discuss some of the new strategies to quit) are prostate and colo-rectal cancer. One may also need to be concerned with lung cancer, if you had a lot of second hand smoke, or smoked in the past for more than 20 years. Smart screening would be to get a baseline blood test for prostate cancer at 50, monitor it your-self, and get it every 2 years unless it goes up. I say keep your own records and sound an alarm if it goes from a normal of 1 to normal of 2 in 2 years or less (or some other minor move up). Sometimes a busy doctor does not pick up these small changes within the normal range so keep your records and review them annually. I would make sure you don't leave without a rectal exam, as this can pick up rectal cancers, early prostate cancers (even with a normal PSA) and are therefore useful. If your doctor skips it than find a new doctor. Report any change in urination to your doctor and don't stop till you get an explanation.

For colon cancer prevention, there is a good test that we all need to commit an afternoon to and just get it done. Your insurance should pay for some of the cost of a colonoscopy after the age of 50. These cancers start as little polyps and are easily treated when found early. If you have a normal scope then you are clean for ten years. We can get one every decade for the next 4 and duck this malady. Please don't skip this test; I have seen some real tragedies in young people who did everything right in their health but bypassed this preventative test. There is no good screening test for lung cancer at this point, but if you have a history of smoke exposure, get a base line chest x ray now in your early 50s and follow up any change in breathing, bloody mucus, non-resolving cough. Final thoughts on all the rest, if you have chronic heart burn get an upper Endoscopy to get the stomach-esophagus junction checked as this cancer is increasing in frequency. Also there is mounting evidence that cell phone use in longer-term studies may increase brain and parotid tumor rates. The 2 years studies are non-conclusive but looking longer term the concerns are there, so use blue tooth or text when you can (not when driving). Our kids are what I worry about as most of us went 40 years before a cell phone became a part of our skull. Encourage your kids to text, use speakerphone and blue tooth.

**Rule 4- Food is medicine.** The good news is that the diet that will reduce cancer risk is also the diet that will reduce vascular disease, dementia, diabetes, and most chronic disease risk. Our bodies developed over thousand of years eating fruits, nuts, and vegetables, interspersed with occasional meat or fish meals. Survival was dependent on our metabolism efficiently storing nutrients and energy to survive the elements until our next feed. Now that there is food at every corner at a cost cheaper than anytime in history, we are akin to a polar bear in the desert. Our biochemistry is working against us in this era of plenty. Animal and human studies of caloric restriction up to 35-40% actually increase survival and longevity. Most studies of supplements of a single vitamin or element to reduce or prevent cancer or heart disease have failed on randomized testing. Nature provides us with the needed combinations for maximum health. The less preserved, industrial produced, formulated **the better**. To avoid being a zealot that would drive one crazy, consider the 80/20 approach. Eighty percent of the times eat “lean, clean and green” and twenty percent of the times eat what you want. This will give you more energy than you had at 18 years and keep you out of the doctor’s office as 30 to 40% of cancers may be related to dietary choices.

I have simplified good nutrition for my workweek and life by the following program. During the week I am interested in the best nutrition that can be obtained quickly to enable my exit out the door by 7-7:30 AM. Enter the “shake”. I have perfected the shake and actually give patient support groups sessions demonstrating it. The Braun 200 watt plunge blender with a beaker glass allows it to happen with a minimum of clean up. I have 6 groups of ingredients that go in each 16 oz shake. The blending of the meal enables you to digest it without much energy and make it and drink it within 8 minutes with only 2 items to wash. The ingredients are; 1) few spoonfuls of low fat organic yogurt, 2) handful of mixed nuts-almonds, walnuts, pecans, 3) scoop of soy protein powder 4) 2or 3 small quantity vegetables (usually 2-4 small carrots, 15 or so baby spinach leaves, possibly tuft of broccoli and any thing you have on hand- you won’t taste any individual item except if you use onions or garlic- be careful there, 5) 2- 4 small quantity fruits- frozen berries, 1/3 of a banana, frozen pitted cherries, pineapple, and anything you have- frozen berries can be purchased and titrated out. 6) Finish with a good juice (no fructose added) to fill it up- favorites Pomegranate-blueberry or grape-cranberry. Blend it in the sink with your hand cupping over the beaker and pulverize it till it is drinkable through your teeth. There can be splatter so be careful.

The second part of the 80 percent clean eating is I only eat a simple salad with oil and vinegar for lunch. No added meat or major cheese. The days when I can do both of these, I feel great and work 8-11 hours without pause and know I can ease up at dinner when I actually can spend some time and enjoy it anyway. In summary; for the nothing meals during our busy lives, go without thinking to the fastest, best nutrition, (often cheapest as well) and move on.

Before ending this section on food is medicine, some final rules. This is the **list of Non-Negotiables** for us and maybe our families as well. 1) Avoid all soft drinks or fructose corn syrup enhanced caloric or even diet drinks. Just say no and don’t buy them

for the house. These cause metabolic chaos and are the main reason our high school yearbooks look much different than today's high school yearbooks. Before cows, pigs, and chickens go to market they fatten them with "hot feed" or corn. Enough said, just drink water at all meals, except for the tea or coffee in morning or other evening beverages of course. 2) Avoid fast food. Other than the subway 6-inch veggie with oil and vinegar, most are dangerous (watch "meet your meat" on UTUBE). 3) Avoid fried foods. Cautezizing saturated fats in a fryer has some bad metabolic consequences. 4) Avoid white carbohydrates or the enriched breads, and refined sugars. Yes this means the white breads, biscuits, rolls, French fries, white rice and potato products, white crackers and else. Choose whole grain products that have more complex long chain carbohydrates that produce a much slower rise in blood sugar and less inflammatory cascade in your body. In essence, *a bowl of white sugar and bowl of corn flakes are different to your tongue but the same to your body's sugar metabolism*. Remember that image and your interest in the "storage food" will fade. 5) Always eat breakfast- critical for weight management and longevity. 6) When you first get up in the morning and are still in a daze feeling off, drink two 12 ounce cups of filtered water immediately. Then move to the tea or coffee routine. I promise that you will feel markedly better within 5 minutes of taking in the water. Remember you body has gone 6-9 hours without fluids, hydrate. 7) Final rule: eat and drink clean for the common things- Filter your drinking water by various options, buy organic milk (recommend Horizon organic skim, it taste like 2%), use organic eggs (1/3 more omega 3s and vitamins), wash non-organic fruits and veggies with spray wash when possible.

**Rule 5-** Anger is toxic to our cardiovascular health so try to avoid it. I good hissy fit can take a few months off our life some say. Learn to roll with the flow when possible and consider slow, deep breathing, (6 second inhale, 6 second hold, 6 second exhale). Divert your thoughts as they tumble down to anger mode to some more entertaining image. This may be a form of delusion but you will live longer and happier.

**Rule 6-**The feeling of being trapped and helpless in life's conditions are a prime precondition for getting cancer. Studies implicate this pattern and event we smart doctors are starting to consider that the mind and the body actually affect each other. Find your passion and chase it to fend off helplessness.

**Rule 7-** No body over 50 stays in good shape without regular almost daily maintenance. If you are like me, we don't have blocks of time to try to go work out and attempt to regain our youth. Most days start early and end late with only 10 to 15 minute cracks of time between events that may enable exercise. Coming to terms with this scheduling fact frees one to move to action rather than wait for that day when time allows the leisurely trip to the health club. I cram into the day what I can in the form of short spurts of exercise which offers me some occasional "recess" from the mental work of the day, and enables me to be fit enough to participate when the opportunity arrives. Here are some time tricks: 1) morning 60- after 3-5 minute stretch worm up on floor matt in guest room,

I do 8 exercises as fast as I can 60 times in sets of 30/20/10 (which sum to 60). The 8 exercises work the whole body and when done fast they take 10 minutes, thus the whole thing takes 15 minutes at most. I do this before the shake and then on to the shower. We all have 15 minutes in the morning to feel great all day (call for details of the exercises if you need ideas and want to try). 2) Most mornings I stretch in the shower/steamer and have 3-5 yoga positions that challenge the muscles and balance (3minutes at end of shower). 3) Grip ring or squeeze ball in center compartment of car that squeeze at red lights or stop 4) Balance board or what is called bongo board that looks like a skate board with teeter- totter barrel in center. I have this against wall at work and pull it out for 3 minutes of play once or twice a day. I also have the stretch cords and handles that I loop around the door handles and use for a few minutes at work to diffuse some energy (3 minutes). 5) Chin up bar in garage that I try to never pass without pulling up and holding legs at perpendicular for 10 count (1 minute). 6) Nightly dog walk – instead of short block, I put 35 lb wt vest (Sports Authority) on and walk the longer route (10-15 minutes). The vest intensifies the walk to offer some pulse elevation and also makes me look like the “hulk” if worn under my coat. As you can see, one can cheat the day and find some slivers of time you did not know existed for working out. The equipment investment is small and you can see major dividends such that you are not starting over the next time you get to the gym or your sport venue. The increase in metabolism from the morning work out will sharpen your mind and aid weight loss as well. Some of this sounds obsessive but I approach it with an attitude of pure fun, and the truth is it allows me to work hard during the week, and play hard on the weekends with those who have time for the health clubs.

I hope these seven rules have offered some new insights that you can find useful and applicable to stay well in the years to come. Send me any questions or addition suggestions.

Keep smiling,  
Chuck

PS. Woops, the rule that trumps them all in regards to quality and length of life- Stay happily married. Repeat mantras often- “ Happy wife, happy life”, or “ You can be right, or you can be happy”.