

# Longevity decoded

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Longevity decoded. (Getty Image)

When international longevity expert Terry Grossman stated recently that in a few years, 80 will be the new 40, it made news around the world. Experts the world over agree that the average lifespan of human beings has increased in the past few decades. And with the focus on all things anti-ageing, it will only get better.

Physician, endocrinologist, diabetologist, anti-ageing specialist and obesity consultant Dr Deepak Chaturvedi says that the average human life expectancy has increased globally. "Today, this figure stands at 83 years, which is dramatically higher than the 38-year expectancy a century ago. A life expectancy of 100 years is

not such a distant target any more. When we discuss longevity and anti-ageing, we need to understand these as two separate concepts, even though they are often considered together."

## What is longevity?

Longevity is a direct increase in the lifespan of an individual determined by the age of the individual. Globally,

infectious diseases like small pox, polio and plagues have been eradicated. Along with controlling these killer diseases, medical technology and knowledge has advanced phenomenally over the past few decades. Many countries have national health and immunization programmes. Access to primary healthcare is easier and media campaigns about hygiene, cleanliness and healthcare have changed the

way society views and deals with medical issues," explains Dr Chaturvedi.

Adds diabetologist Dr Pradeep Gadge, "We can contribute an increase in longevity to infectious and parasitic diseases being dramatically tamed by man. Except the fall in life expectancy in some African countries due to HIV/ AIDS, the trend all over the world is that life expectancy is increasing. Both child and adult mortality rates have considerably reduced since 1990. The average yearly rates of decline in mortality have been 3.7% per year for children and 1.3% per year for adults. While major diseases have been contained, non-communicable diseases have increased. These include cancer, diabetes, heart diseases, etc. Thanks to better medical

infrastructure, these patients live longer although their quality of life (at times) may decrease. Better living standards, healthier diets and cleaner drinking water has also helped curb deaths. Information technology is playing its role. Better ways to diagnose and treat has had a huge impact on longevity."

### **Preventive measures**

There are four preventive areas dealing with diseases and ill-health. "These are primordial, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention methods. - Primordial prevention involves the avoidance of risk factors and healthy living habits. Factors like good sanitation, clean environment and the practice of healthy habits apply here. - Primary prevention involves the avoidance of bad habits that would increase the risk of illness or disease. Avoiding these habits reduces the risk of bad health. Immunisation programmes are also considered under primary prevention. - Secondary prevention involves good healthcare because it is dependent on early diagnosis. Most diseases that are caught in their infancy can be tackled with modern healthcare methods. - Tertiary prevention involves limiting the complications associated with a disease. Rehabilitation of patients during and after their recovery is also classified under this. With tertiary prevention, we're talking about increasing the chances of a long life through decisively treating the disease," says **Dr Chaturvedi**.

### **How to maintain optimal health**

"While life expectancy is increasing, somewhere we are straying from optimal health. Today, we seem to go through life feeling tired, low on energy, suffering problems like bloating with intestinal gas, stomach upsets, heartburn or sleeplessness. Our minds have become dull. Depression, anxiety and emotional outbursts are increasing. Some of the food we eat is far less nutritious than earlier, courtesy pesticides, additives and preservatives. Therefore, an average person's diet is not providing sufficient amounts of nutrients needed for optimal health. Processed foods and chemical additives have upset our body chemistry. High intake of sugar is implicated in many physical and emotional disorders. High consumption of salt can result in weight gain as it causes the body to retain water," says Dr Gadge.

### **To maintain optimal health, one must...**

- Stay active and exercise often.
  - Cut down on smoking, alcohol and tobacco consumption.
  - Find ways to de-stress yourself — yoga and meditation are effective options.
  - Emotional and mental health is an important aspect of optimal health — pay attention to it.
- Remove sufficient time for your hobbies.
- Go in for regular health check-ups after your 30s.

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