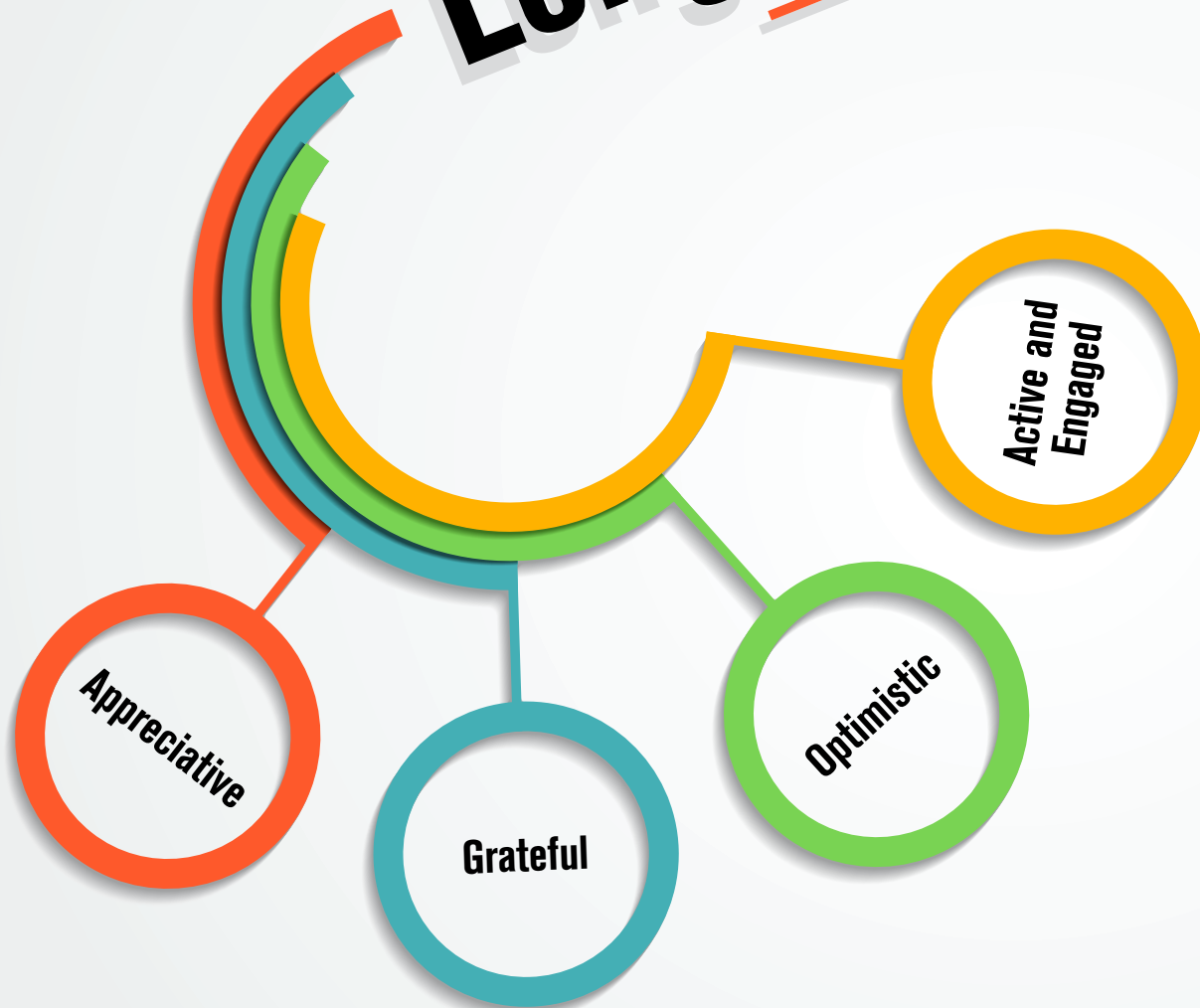



Longevity 2.0



Getting older is inevitable,
but being 'ooold' is optional.

By Noelle Nelson, Ph.D.



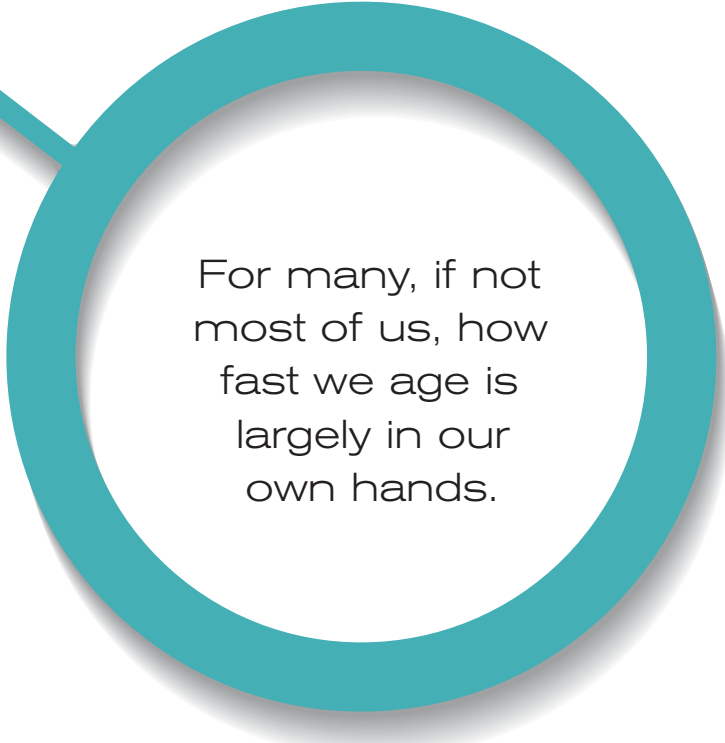
Because I travel a lot for work, I meet all sorts of people in various airports and on airplanes all over the world. More often than not, our brief interactions are quite wonderful. So imagine my surprise when this interaction turned out very differently. We were in takeoff mode, and the flight attendant had gone through her usual drill, including the “Please turn your electronic devices off” admonition. I obediently powered down my cell, although the young man next to me did not. He had his ear buds firmly planted in his ears, so I figured he hadn’t heard the announcement. I mentioned to him the flight attendant’s instruction—he glanced at me and kept right on texting. But as the doors were closed and the plane began to taxi down the runway, I was concerned.

“Would you please turn off your phone?” I asked. “Your cell’s frequencies could interfere with the pilot’s radio frequencies. It’s not safe.”

“What would *you* know?” the young man responded. “You’re *oold*.”

His rudeness aside, I was utterly appalled that somehow, the fact of being, I don’t know—more than 40?—made me technologically illiterate, lacking in knowledge or mental capacity. Nothing could be further from the truth! Not that I’m some sort of techno whiz, but I do have a basic understanding of how technology works, and more important, I know plenty of people in their 70s, 80s, and beyond who are mentally sharp, well-informed, and fully engaged in our world.

So, good scientist that I am, I spent some time looking into perceptions on aging. I discovered that despite the scientifically validated vitality of a large swath of our over-65 population, society as a whole has relegated that group—and even more so, those over 75—to the land of the “*ooold*”—useless, ignorant, and decrepit, if not downright stupid. That is absolutely false!



For many, if not most of us, how fast we age is largely in our own hands.

So what does science have to say about this? What can we do to thrive—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually—in those precious post-60 decades of our lives? This question may be more important than we know because according to genetics researchers, we may soon be living a lot longer—possibly to 150 by the turn of the century! Far better that we live our later years in optimal health and joy rather than decline and despair.

First, the Science

Much research has analyzed how we age and what it takes to reach the land of happy, healthy longevity. Most of it shows a strong link between our brain and the rest of our body. That makes sense. Every single one of the major systems—our nervous system, hormonal system, gastrointestinal system, immune system, and cardiovascular system—are set up to communicate with one another. A massive information exchange is continually occurring:

Our thoughts and our feelings release certain chemicals from our brain. These chemicals, called neuropeptides, act like messengers to specific receptor sites on our cells. These receptor sites, upon receiving this mental and emotional information, are now equipped to tell our cells how to respond. The condition of our body is, to a surprisingly large degree, a biochemical result of what we think and feel.

Study after study shows that positive emotions rule. When we experience positive thoughts and feelings, like appreciation, our brain operates more coherently and efficiently, allowing us to function at our best. We have less trouble focusing, our memory is sharper, and we are more motivated and energized. Our coordination is solid. We more easily tolerate the bumps and hurdles of life.

Gratitude, another important emotion, supports cardiovascular health as well as our immune system, according to a study published in the *American Journal of Cardiology*. Researchers found that cultivating gratitude significantly reduces stress, which in turn boosts immune function and overall health, both of which contribute to longevity.

A 2015 survey published in the *Health Behavior and Policy Review* of more than 51,000 ethnically diverse Americans between the ages of 45 and 84 showed that optimists are twice as likely to be in ideal cardiovascular health as compared to pessimists. (*Optimist* literally means *best*.)

The next step is to put appreciation, gratitude, and optimism into action. An active and engaged lifestyle lends itself to better mental acuity. A Dallas Lifespan Brain Study of 300 individuals between the ages of 50 and 89 found that the brains of people who were busy could reason better and had better working memory, vocabulary, and ability to remember specific events from the past.

For each of the studies mentioned here, numerous additional examples exist showing similar results. The trend is pretty clear: For many, if not most of us, how fast we age is largely in our own hands.

Applying Unity Principles

If Longevity 1.0 is being mindful of such basic information as the body’s need for healthy nutrition and physical exercise, Longevity 2.0 is being mindful of our overall need for positive thought and emotion. This is a powerful spiritual principle, a core Unity understanding, which can only be manifested through the living of it.

The simplest, easiest way I know to experience life through positive thought and emotion is to focus as much as possible on what we can appreciate about ourselves or a situation, rather than to fester over what we can’t do or don’t

have. In other words, we need to shift our focus to all that we can be grateful for and appreciate as often as possible.

Here are three easy, highly effective methods that you can use anytime and anywhere for doing just that:

1 Play the “What If” Game Positively

We all play the “what if” game, but mostly, we play it negatively: *What if I’m late? What if the traffic is awful? What if I’ve got cancer? What if I’ve got Alzheimer’s? What if I can’t get a job?* What if, what if, what if.

Instead, play the “what if” game positively: *What if other people are late, too, and nobody notices I came in late? What if the traffic is easier than I thought? What if it’s not cancer but just indigestion? What if my tumor is benign? What if I just forgot something? After all, people forget things all the time—it doesn’t have to be Alzheimer’s. What if there are plenty of jobs out there and I just haven’t looked in the right place yet?*

By thinking in terms of the positive possibilities of “what if,” you immediately relax a little, which sends the message to your immune system that it doesn’t have to go into that emergency fight-or-flight mode, which is hard on your health. Your heart rate goes back to normal, blood starts flowing more readily to your brain, your outlook improves, and you’re in better shape.

2 Appreciate What Is

Take a page from any optimist’s playbook: Don’t dwell on what isn’t working, what you don’t have, or what you can’t do. Appreciate what is going right, what you do have, and what you can do.

Of course, if the diagnosis is cancer, you’re not going to appreciate having cancer. But you can appreciate that you have access to resources—that there are great doctors out there, that cancer survivors give wonderful support, and that prayer from your friends and family works.

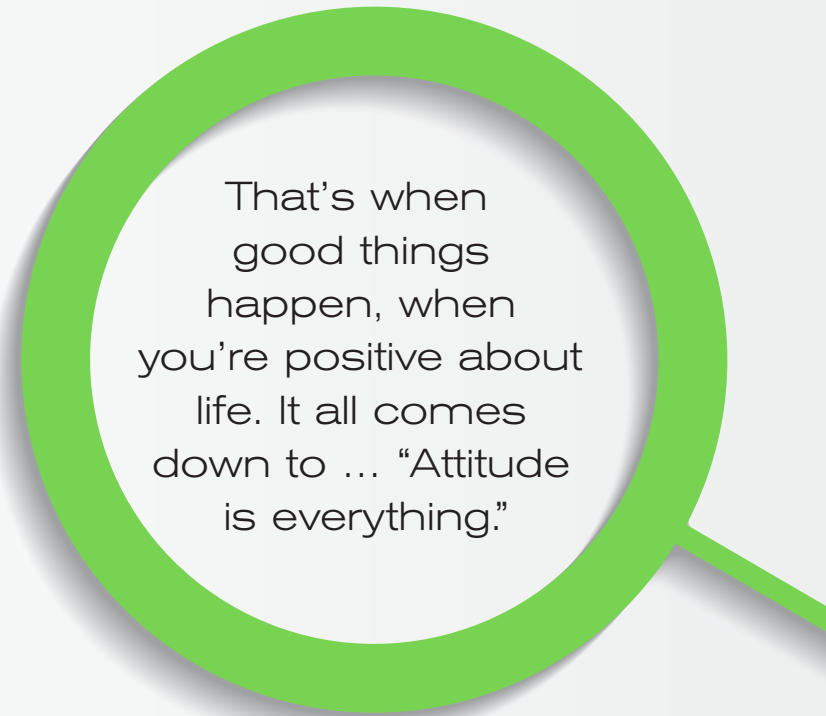
If you’re hung up in traffic—to take a more mundane example—appreciate that you’re safe and dry in your car or the bus, and that you finally have the time to listen to that audiobook or podcast. Appreciate that somehow you always get where you need to go eventually.

No matter what the situation is, look to what you can value here and now, just like AMP 1’s stand-up basketball-playing amputees—the only such team in the country. These players—who’ve lost their legs—look to their arms, their brains, and their love of the sport to make a new and satisfying life for themselves.

3 Reminisce Constructively

Most of us, when faced with a situation we don’t like, reminisce destructively. We tell others, “I’ve always had problems with my health,” “I’ve never had any luck with doctors,” “It takes me forever to find a job,” “The worst thing always happens to me,” or “Watch—everyone in the office will know I’m late; it never fails.”

We’ve all had our ups and downs, so focus more on the ups you’ve had and not the downs. Remember the times when you’ve healed easily from something, when a doctor steered you on the right path, when you found a job you liked. Even if you have to dig deep into your childhood, I guarantee if you look hard enough, you’ll find times when things went right.



That’s when good things happen, when you’re positive about life. It all comes down to ... “Attitude is everything.”

Mindfully focus on these memories to give your body and your mind a chance to relax and be at ease. That’s when good things happen, when you’re positive about life. It all comes down to the old saying, “Attitude is everything.”

So even if you can’t remember where you put the car keys for the moment, remember that whatever your attitude is about aging, or about anything else, that attitude will often be self-fulfilling. So why not make it a positive one? 🌍