

John Robbins

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

HEALTHY AT 100

HOW TO EXTEND YOUR LIFE AND STAY FIT!



'John Robbins inspires me on every page'

Morgan Spurlock of *Supersize Me*



HEALTHY AT 100

THANK YOU

For Your Kindness & Wisdom,
God Bless You..



DR. AZWAN
ABDULLAH AL-HADI
29/2/08

7.15pm.

Thanks Tun ...

You and your husband are my
inspirations ...



DR WAN SYAHIRAH BT
YANG MOHSIN



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TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

HEALTHY AT 100

HOW TO EXTEND YOUR LIFE
AND STAY FIT!

John Robbins



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First published in Great Britain in 2006

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978 0340 909454

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The paper and board used in this paperback are natural recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Hodder & Stoughton
A Division of Hodder Headline Ltd
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH
www.madaboutbooks.com

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*I wish you health.
I wish you wealth
That passes not with time.
I wish you long years.
May your heart be as patient as the earth
Your love as warm as the harvest gold.
May your days be full, as the city is full
Your nights as joyful as dancers.
May your arms be as welcoming as home.
May your faith be as enduring as God's love
Your spirit as valiant as your heritage.
May your hand be as sure as a friend
Your dreams as hopeful as a child.
May your soul be as brave as your people
And may you be blessed.*

Wigglier Blessing



FOREWORD

BY MORGAN SPURLOCK

We live in a time, especially in America, where our elders aren't revered as they once were. They don't move in with their sons and daughters, instead they are shipped off to 'retirement communities' and 'assisted living facilities' where they will live out their days and where their families will be unburdened by them.

My grandparents are old. Not feeble and can-barely-get-around old, but funny, sharp, going a little deaf and not-afraid-to-tell-you-exactly-what's-on-their-mind old. Of the four, three of them are still alive; both my grandmothers are eighty-four and my grandfather is ninety. 'Good genes', my doctor tells me. But I think there's more to the story than that.

The only one of my grandparents who smoked is the only one who has passed away, of a heart attack six years ago, at the age of seventy-nine. All of my grandparents rarely drank alcohol – in fact, I have never seen any of them drink alcohol in my lifetime. And all of them worked harder than anyone I have ever seen. My grandfather, who will be ninety-one in a few weeks, has only recently started showing signs of old age taking hold. Up until now, he was a whirlwind – a man that you could never slow down, let alone stop. Idle hands, idle mind. He was an object in motion my entire life – that is, until recently.

He had a few open-heart surgeries over the years, some of which were due to hereditary causes, but his relative good health can be attributed to the West Virginia diet he subsisted on his whole life (as I did in my childhood.) A lifetime of fresh meat and vegetables, most of which he hunted or grew himself until late in life. Throughout my

childhood, I don't think I ever had a meal without some sort of vegetable from their garden.

They rarely went out to restaurants. They never ate junk food, with the exception of homemade pies, cookies or cakes now and then. They saved their money and they treasured their marriages. Each one of them married their best friend. They were always active in community events and family affairs, they loved spending time with their grandchildren and they always shared their knowledge.

I have been lucky enough to spend a lot of time with my grandparents, and the time I get to spend with them now is more precious than ever. They have unlocked the door to a healthy life and a healthy future for me . . . and this book has swung that door wide open. Hopefully it will do the same for you.

INTRODUCTION

A new vision of ageing that can help you live years longer

‘**E**very young man’, wrote Ernest Hemingway, ‘believes he will live forever.’ And the same could be said for every young woman. But whatever our beliefs and thoughts about life, there remains an irrefutable, undeniable and ever-present fact: we are, each and every one of us, growing older.

This is true in every country and among every people throughout the world, but how different cultures have responded to this reality has varied widely.

For many of us in the industrialised world today, our ageing is a source of grief and anxiety. We fear ageing. The elderly population we see are for the most part increasingly senile, frail and unhappy. As a result, rather than looking forward to growing old, we dread each passing birthday. Rather than seeing our later years as a time of harvesting, growth and maturity, we fear that the deterioration of our health will so greatly impair our lives that to live a long life might be more of a curse than a blessing.

When we think of being old, our images are often ones of decrepitude and despair. It seems more realistic to imagine ourselves languishing in nursing homes than to picture ourselves swimming, gardening, laughing with loved ones, and delighting in children and nature.

In 2005, the well-known author Hunter S. Thompson took his own life. He was sixty-seven, and had no incurable disease. He was

wealthy and famous, and his thirty-two-year-old wife loved him. But according to the literary executor of Thompson's will, 'he made a conscious decision that he . . . wasn't going to suffer the indignities of old age.'¹

It doesn't help to live in a society where there is so little respect for the elderly. Television programmes and films frequently portray older people as feeble, unproductive, grumpy and stubborn. Advertisements selling everything from alcohol to cars feature beautiful young people, giving the impression that older people are irrelevant. Colloquialisms such as 'geezer', 'old fogey', 'old maid', 'dirty old man' and 'old goat' demean the elderly and perpetuate a stereotype of older people as unworthy of consideration or positive regard.

Greeting card companies routinely sell birthday cards that mock the mobility, intellect and sex drive of the no-longer young. Novelty-gift companies sell 'Over-the-Hill' products such as fiftieth birthday 'Coffin Gift Boxes' containing prune juice and a 'decision maker to assist in planning daily activities' (a large dice, with sides labelled 'nap', 'TV', 'shopping', etc.). Gifts for a man's sixtieth birthday include a 'lifetime supply' of condoms (one), Over-the-Hill bubble bath (canned beans), and 'Old Fart' party hats.

We may chuckle at such humour, but negative stereotypes about ageing are insidious. They attach a social stigma to ageing that can affect your will to live and even shorten your life. In a study published by the American Psychological Association, Yale School of Public Health professor Becca Levy concluded that even if you are not aware of them, negative thoughts about ageing that you pick up from society can undermine your health and have disastrous consequences.

In this study, a large number of middle-aged people were interviewed six times over the course of twenty years, and asked whether they agreed with such statements as, 'as you get older, you are less useful'. Remarkably, the perceptions held by people about ageing proved to have more impact on how long they would live than their blood pressure, their cholesterol levels, whether they smoked, or whether they exercised. Those people who had positive perceptions of ageing lived an average of $7\frac{1}{2}$ years longer than those with negative images of growing older.²

Negative images not only lead to compromised health and shortened lives, but they are also devastating in the present. Dr Levy's study found that people with negative perceptions of ageing were more likely to consider their lives to be worthless, empty and hopeless, while those with more positive perceptions of ageing were

INTRODUCTION

more likely to view their lives as fulfilling and hopeful.

When we are disrespectful to older people and make them invisible, we also try to ignore the ageing process that we are all experiencing. We hide its signs, and look away from the longer-term consequences of our lifestyles. As a result, we make lifestyle choices that may make sense in the short term, but take a terrible toll in the end.

I asked a friend recently how he thought he might age. ‘I’ll probably end up in a nursing home somewhere,’ he replied with some bitterness, ‘with a feeding tube in my nose, staring at the acoustic squares in the ceiling, incontinent, impotent and impoverished.’ Sadly, such views are not unusual. I’ve seen stickers in car rear windows that say, ‘Avenge Yourself: Live Long Enough To Become A Burden To Your Children’. When you distrust the ageing process, it’s hard to imagine yourself enjoying your older years, doing things like dancing, jogging or hiking. It can be difficult even to consider the possibility that you might, during every phase of your lifetime, have the capacity for growth, change and creativity.

In the last hundred years, we’ve added nearly thirty years to the average life expectancy in the industrialised world, but for many older adults the later years are not a time of happiness and well-being. A century ago, the average adult in the West spent only 1 per cent of his or her life in a morbid or ill state, but today’s average adult spends more than 10 per cent of his or her life ill. People are living longer today, but all too often they are dying longer, too – of chronic diseases that cause frailty and cognitive impairment.

By 2025, the annual cost of managing chronic conditions in the US will exceed a trillion dollars. Already, half of those aged sixty-five and over have two or more chronic diseases, and a quarter have problems so severe as to limit their ability to perform one or more normal activities of daily life. Meanwhile, the average age of the chronically ill is continually getting younger. Throughout the industrialised world, people are living longer, but they are becoming ill at an earlier age, so the number of years they spend chronically ill is actually increasing in both directions.

Sometimes I think we have not so much prolonged our lives, as prolonged our dying. While we have extended the human *life* span, we have not extended the human *health* span.

THE AGE WAVE

As our older people are getting less and less well, their numbers are

increasing, and this process is about to shift into hyper-drive. As author Ken Dychtwald has described in his seminal book *Age Power*, there are at this very moment approximately 80 million baby-boomers in the USA alone barreling towards old age.³ (The term ‘baby-boomer’ generally refers to people born between 1945 and 1960.)

In 1900, there were only 3 million people in the USA who were sixty-five or older. By 2000, the number had leapt to 33 million. There is a similar age distribution in the UK.

A century ago in the Western world, the odds of living to the age of 100 were less than 1 in 500. Now the US Census Bureau expects that 1 in 26 baby-boomers will reach that age. Today, the likelihood that a twenty-year-old American will have a grandmother alive (91 per cent) is higher than the likelihood that a twenty-year-old in 1900 had a living mother (83 per cent).⁴

This advancing age wave is the most significant demographic event of our time, and it is taking place in every industrialised nation in the world. About half of all people who have ever lived to be sixty-five or older are alive today.

In Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela, the percentage of elderly in the population is projected to double between 2000 and 2025.⁵ China is expected to be home to 332 million ‘oldsters’ by the middle of this century – that’s more elderly people in a *single* country than inhabited the entire planet as recently as 1990.⁶

According to the UN’s Population Division, roughly 10 per cent of the world’s 6.4 billion people are today aged over sixty, and by 2050, some 20 per cent of the planet’s 10 billion human beings will be over sixty. By then, there will be nearly 2 billion people in the world aged sixty or over. This is a number roughly equal to one-third of the entire current global human population.

This increased longevity would be a great blessing if it was accompanied by increased health and wisdom, but all too often it is not. Close to half of all Americans over the age of eighty-five have Alzheimer’s disease. The toll taken by this illness and other chronic diseases of the elderly is increasing so much that the average twenty-first-century person in the industrialised nations will probably spend more years caring for parents than for children.

By 2040, it is estimated that 5.5 million Americans – more than the entire current population of Denmark – will live in nursing homes. Another 12 million – equal to the combined populations of Israel, Singapore and New Zealand – will require ongoing homecare services. This trend can be seen across the Western world. Many

will spend their final decades struggling with loneliness and depression.

Although modern medicine seems eminently equipped to prolong life, it seems to be far less able to promote healthy ageing. What good will it do us, asked one comedian in 2004 if, at some point in the future, the human life span is extended to 200 years, but the last 150 of those are spent in unremitting pain and sadness?

There is an ancient Greek fable that tells of Aurora, the beautiful goddess of the dawn, falling deeply in love with a human being – the warrior Tithonus. Distraught over his mortality, Aurora requests a special favour from Zeus, the supreme ruler of Mount Olympus and of the pantheon of gods who reside there. She begs Zeus to grant her lover eternal life.

Zeus, foreseeing trouble, asks her if she is certain that this is what she wants. ‘Yes,’ she responds.

At first, Aurora is delighted that Zeus has granted her request, but then she realises that she neglected to ask that Tithonus also remain eternally young and healthy. With each passing year, she looks on with horror as he grows older and more ill. His skin withers, his organs rot, and his brain grows feeble. As the decades pass, Tithonus’ ageing body becomes increasingly frail, yet he cannot die. Ultimately the once proud warrior is reduced to a wretched collection of pained, foul and broken bones – but he continues to live for ever.

Like Tithonus, ever more of us are living longer, but our added years are all too often ones of suffering and disability.

MORE LIFE, MORE HEALTH

It has been said that we can destroy ourselves by negativity just as effectively as by bombs. If we see only the worst in ourselves, it erodes our capacity to act. If, on the other hand, we are drawn forward by a positive vision of how we might live, then we can shrug off the cynicism that has become so fashionable and build truly healthy lives.

It is extraordinarily important for us today to replace the prevailing image and reality of ageing with a new vision – one in which we grasp the possibility of living all our days with exuberance and a passion for life. There are few things of greater consequence today than for us to bring our lives into alignment with our true potential for health and our dreams for a better tomorrow.

In terms of fulfilling that goal, it is a loss that our medical model

has been so focused on illness rather than wellness. Until recently, there has been so much preoccupation with disease that little attention has been paid to the characteristics that enable people to lead long and healthy lives, and to be energetic and independent in their later years. As a result, few of us in the industrialised world are aware that there have been, and still are, entire cultures where the majority of people live passionately and vibrantly to the end. Few of us realise that there are in fact whole societies where people look forward to growing old, knowing they will be healthy, vital and respected.

There are many people today who want to live in harmony with their bodies and the natural forces of life. You may be one of them. If so, it's helpful to understand that you are not alone, and that you have others from whom you can learn how to accomplish your goals. There are cultures whose ways have stood the test of time and who can stand as teachers on the path of wellness and joy. There are whole populations of highly spirited, vigorous people, who are healthy in their seventies, eighties, nineties – and even at 100. What's more, they have a great deal in common with one another, and their secrets have been corroborated – and to a large extent explained – by many of the latest findings in medical science. New research is showing that we have all the tools to live longer lives, and to remain active, productive and resourceful until the very end.

This is good and hopeful news, and offers us a much-needed paradigm of ageing as a period of wisdom and vitality. Through these cultures, we can find a compelling vision of how to mature with pleasure, dignity, purpose and love. We are being shown that something precious is possible – a far brighter future in which ageing is enjoyable and desirable. And we are being shown the practical steps we can take to achieve it.

Ageing, of course, is not something that begins on your sixty-fifth birthday. Who you will become in your later years is shaped by all the choices you make about your future – all of the ways you care for yourself, how you manage your life, and even how you think, from your earliest years, about your future. I have written this book because I have seen too many people grow old in agony and bitterness, while others grow old with vitality and beauty, and I know it is eminently possible to live with far more vigour, happiness and inner peace than is the norm in the Western world today.

No one familiar with my earlier work will be surprised that I am interested in how our diets and exercise can help us to live long and optimally healthy lives. But they may be surprised by some of my

findings, including the great emphasis I'm now placing on strong social connections. I've learned that the quality of the relationships you have with other people makes a tremendous difference to your physical as well as emotional health. Loneliness, I discovered in my research, can kill you faster than cigarettes. And, by the same token, intimate relationships that are authentic and life-affirming can have enormous and even miraculous healing powers. In this book you'll find out why this is so, and gain clarity about the various essential steps you can take to dramatically extend both your life span and your health span. Reading this book will not only help you to add many years to your life, but also help to make those added years – and indeed all your remaining years – ones in which you experience the blossoming of your finest and wisest self.

Even if you've eaten badly and have not taken very good care of yourself up to now, even if you've had more than your share of hardships and pain, this book will show you how the choices you make today and tomorrow can greatly improve your prospects for the future. It will give you a chance to right any wrongs you've committed against your body, and you'll see how to regain the strength and passion for life that you may have thought were gone for ever.

Whether you're in your twenties or eighties or somewhere in between, and whether you consider yourself superbly fit or hopelessly out of shape, I believe you'll find in these pages what you need in order to regenerate rather than degenerate as the years unfold. This book will show you how to regain and to retain more mental clarity, physical strength, stamina and joy.

I have written *Healthy at 100* to offer you ways to enhance and improve both the quality and quantity of all your remaining years. There are steps you can take to shatter stereotypes and misconceptions about ageing, and to rejuvenate your mind and body. There are practices you can start today in order to live with greater health and joy, no matter what your age.

In our youth-oriented culture, ageing is often a source of great suffering. Older people frequently start to see themselves as collections of symptoms rather than whole human beings. But it doesn't have to be that way – it is within your grasp to realise the opportunities for beauty, love and fulfilment that occur at every age. It is possible to live your whole life with a commitment to your highest good, and I have written *Healthy at 100* so that you can learn how to make each and every one of your years more full of vitality and joy, and more worth living, than you may ever have imagined.



PART ONE

THE WORLD'S HEALTHIEST AND LONGEST-LIVING PEOPLE



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YATASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA



CHAPTER ONE

ABKHASIA: ANCIENTS OF THE CAUCASUS

Where people are healthier at ninety
than most of us are in middle age

*'People don't grow old.
When they stop growing, they become old.'*

— Anonymous

In the early 1970s, the *National Geographic* magazine approached the world-renowned doctor Alexander Leaf, asking him to visit, study and write an article about the world's healthiest and most long-living people. Dr Leaf, a professor of Clinical Medicine at Harvard University and Chief of Medical Services at Massachusetts General Hospital in the USA, had long been a student of this subject, and had already visited and studied some of the cultures and civilisations known for the healthy lives of their elderly people. Now, the *National Geographic* magazine was commissioning him to continue these travels and investigations, and to share with the world his observations and comparisons of those areas famous for the longevity and health of their inhabitants. The early 1970s was a time, unlike today, when these regions and their cultures were still somewhat pristine.

As a scientist, Dr Leaf did not believe in a mythical fountain of

youth in which anyone can bathe and be miraculously restored to eternal youth; nor did he believe in magic potions that can instantly heal all afflictions. But he did believe it was possible that there existed certain places on Earth where people actually lived longer and more healthy lives than is considered normal in the Western world today. His goal was not to identify the oldest living individual, but rather to locate and study those societies – if they did in fact exist – where a large percentage of older citizens retained their faculties, were vigorous, and enjoyed their lives. Rather than being interested in mythology or panaceas, Leaf's goal was to understand the key factors that influence health and longevity.

Dr Leaf undertook a series of journeys that he subsequently described in a most influential series of articles that appeared in the *National Geographic* magazine, beginning in 1973.¹ His writings were among the first authoritative efforts to bring practical medical knowledge and research to our desire to know what we can do to impact the future of our lives.

When Leaf began his study and his travels, three regions of the world were famous for the longevity of their inhabitants: Vilcabamba in Ecuador; the Hunza region of Pakistan; and certain portions of the Caucasus Mountains in what was then the Soviet Union. These three regions had in fact long been the subject of claims that they were home to the longest-living and healthiest people in the world. According to the stories swirling around these high mountainous regions, people in these communities often lived spectacularly long lives in vibrant health.

Leaf and prize-winning *National Geographic* photographer John Launois travelled to these remote areas to meet, photograph, medically examine, and appraise for themselves the longevity and health of those who were reputed to be the world's oldest and healthiest people. Leaf listened to their hearts, took their blood pressure, and studied their diets and lifestyles. He watched them dance and saw them bathe in icy-cold mountain streams; he spoke with them about their daily lives, their hopes, their fears and their life histories. His goal was to separate fact from fallacy and determine the truth about longevity.

LONGEVITY IN ABKHASIA

'Certainly no area in the world', Leaf wrote, 'has the reputation for long-lived people to match that of the Caucasus in southern Russia.'² And in all the Caucasus, the area most renowned for its

extraordinary number of healthy centenarians (people above the age of 100) was Abkhasia (pronounced ‘Ab-Kay-Zhia’). A 1970 census had established Abkhasia, then an autonomous region within Soviet Georgia, as the longevity capital of the world. ‘We were eager to see the centenarians,’ Leaf said, ‘and Abkhasia seemed to be the place to do so.’³

Abkhasia covers 3,000 square miles between the eastern shores of the Black Sea and the crestline of the main Caucasus Mountains. It is bordered on the north by Russia, and to the south by Georgia.

Prior to Dr Leaf’s visit, claims had been widely circulating for life spans as great as 150 among the Abkhassians. Just a few years earlier, *Life* magazine had run an article with photos of Shirali Muslimov, said to be 161.⁴ In one of the photos, Muslimov was shown with his third wife. He told the reporter that he married her when he was 110, that his parents had both lived to over 100, and that his brother had died at the age of 134.

Muslimov had passed away by the time of Leaf’s studies, but a woman named Khfaf Lasuria had also been featured in the *Life* article. Leaf wanted to meet her, and managed to find her in the Abkhasian village of Kutol, where she sang in a choir made up entirely, he was told, of Abkhasian centenarians:

I had a long talk with this diminutive – she stands not five feet tall – sprightly woman who claimed to be 141 years old . . . Although she carried a handsomely carved wooden walking stick, her nimbleness belied need of it. Her memory seemed excellent . . . She spoke lucidly and easily about events recent and past. At the age of 75 to 80 as a midwife she assisted more than 100 babies into the world . . . She described the life of women: ‘Women had a very difficult time before the Revolution; we were practically slaves.’ And she ended our talk with a toast, ‘I want to drink to women all over the world . . . for them not to work too hard and to be happy with their families.’⁵

Although he was greatly impressed by this elderly lady’s charm and spirit, Leaf did not merely take her word for her age. In fact, to the contrary, he went to significant lengths to assess it objectively. Such a task is harder than it might sound, for there are no signs in the human body – like the annual rings of a tree – that tell us a person’s age.

After laborious investigations, Leaf concluded that Mrs Lasuria was close to 130 years old. He wasn’t certain about that, saying

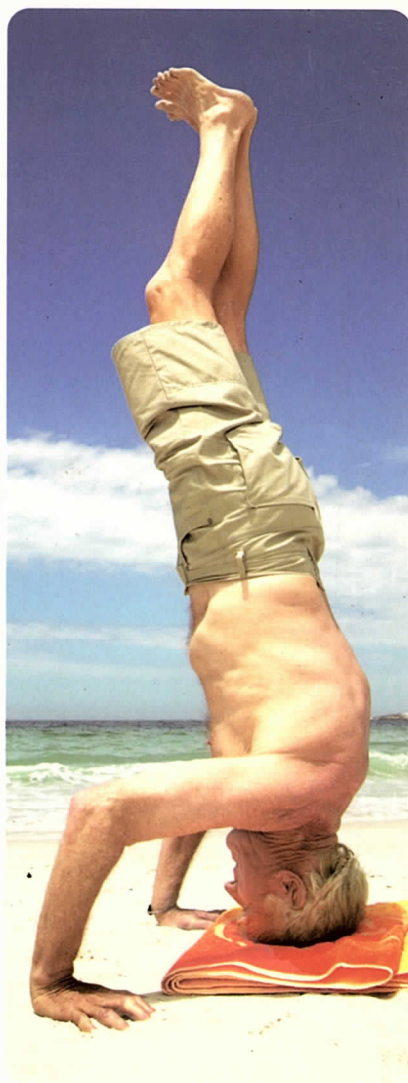
HEALTHY AT 100 IS NOT JUST ANOTHER BOOK ON AGEING OR LONGEVITY

John Robbins shifts rigid paradigms to show 77 million baby boomers, and especially the 24 million who are already over fifty, that they do not need to live and die like their parents. He takes on the self-fulfilling fears of ageing and argues powerfully that the illnesses and increasing frailty that we assume are inevitable are not a natural part of ageing and can be avoided with healthy diet and lifestyle choices.

John Robbins presents the secrets of four of the world's healthiest and longest-living cultures, together with the latest findings of medical science, to convince readers that it is never too late, nor too early, to make changes that will ensure a healthy, active later life.

Sometimes I think we have not so much prolonged our lives, as prolonged our dying. While we have extended the human life span, we have not extended the human health span.

Widely considered to be one of the world's leading experts on the dietary link between the environment and health, **John Robbins** is the author of *Diet for a New America: How Your Food Choices Affect Your Health, Happiness, and the Future of Life on Earth* which has sold more than one million copies.



Non-fiction: Health

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ISBN 978-0340-909454



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