

# stay younger, longer.

Naturopath **Louise O'Connor** shows you to develop your own personal 'longevity strategy' to slow ageing.



As you age, the ability of your body to power up energy can decline, robbing you of the youthful energy you once enjoyed. The key hormone in energy metabolism is insulin. When insulin is working well, it plays a critical role in mobilising blood sugar out of the bloodstream and into the cells to be used as energy. However, when insulin cannot do its job, blood sugar builds up in the bloodstream.

Studies stress the importance of managing your blood glucose levels within acceptable levels. Currently a lab value above 6.1 mmol/L is widely accepted as an indicator of impaired insulin activity. However some experts question this level. They argue a fasting blood glucose level below 4.7 mmol/L (85 mg/dl) is far more acceptable. If left unchecked, sugar weaves a destructive path through the body. Too much sugar not only leads to middle age spread - excess blood sugar is a major factor in many chronic health problems.

## Watch your diet

Declining blood sugar control can signal the development of diabetes, the fastest growing lifestyle disease in Western countries which is tipped to emerge as a serious health crisis.

Slash your diabetes risk by eating less sugary foods and performing regular physical activity. The upside of effectively managing your blood sugar levels is other markers such as cholesterol and triglycerides also improve. The food we eat has a powerful effect on ageing, even cancer prevention. According to a *New*

*England Journal of Medicine* study, cancer results from the accumulation of mutations in genes that regulate cell proliferation. One of the best ways to ensure healthy gene activity at a cellular level is to eat a fresh, wholesome diet.

Adopt a traditional Mediterranean diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with fish and beans as protein sources. Dairy products and poultry should be kept to a minimum, and you should only eat small amounts of good quality red meat. Olive oil is a major component of the Mediterranean diet. Pure extra virgin olive oil is a rich source of healthy mono-unsaturated fatty acids. Olive oil is superior to canola and soy bean oil which are often listed on food labels as 'vegetable oils'.

Superfoods are powerful, nutritionally dense, antioxidant-rich foods. The superfood list includes foods sourced

## YOGA, FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

You know that yoga eases stress and boosts strength and flexibility, but did you also know that it prevents age-related disease? According to a study published in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, women who regularly practised yoga had lower levels of the cytokine interleukin-6 (IL-6) in their blood – IL-6 is responsible for triggering the inflammatory response which is involved in heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis.

from all over the planet - pomegranates, blueberries, mangosteen, bee pollen, chia seeds, goji berries, coconut oil, cacao (raw chocolate) and acai berries all have tremendous healing abilities. In fact, health experts now tout these superfoods as the medicine of the future.

## Have a thyroid check

The symptoms of an underactive thyroid are often overlooked. The warning signs - memory problems, slow heart rate, foggy thinking, dry skin and a reduced tolerance to the cold - appear gradually and are often attributed to normal ageing.

A complete thyroid screening test should be performed routinely in people aged over 65 years. If you suspect a problem, discuss a thyroid check-up with your health practitioner. A proper diagnosis is achieved by measuring blood levels of thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH), thyroid antibodies and the major thyroid hormones, free thyroxine (T4) and free triiodothyronine (T3). In addition, manage your weight. An Australian study published in *Internal Medicine Journal* concluded obesity is a significant risk factor in the development of an underactive thyroid gland in later life.

Specific nutrients support thyroid health. Bladderwrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*) is a prized seaweed traditionally used in Western herbal medicine as a thyroid tonic. It is also a rich source of iodine to support thyroid hormone production. And, according to a *Medical Hypotheses* study, zinc and selenium are necessary to assist thyroid hormone activity.



### Try the youth boosters

Nature provides many tools to assist feelings of vitality, harmony and balance, and to support wellbeing at any age.

**Bilberry** (*Vaccinium myrtillus*): Often called the 'vision herb', this is an effective eye tonic. Bilberry is prized for its ability to help maintain visual acuity and night vision.

**B vitamins:** Essential for energy metabolism. Pyridoxal 5-phosphate, the metabolically active form of vitamin B6, is necessary for the activation of mood-regulating neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA).

**Chromium:** A trace mineral that plays an important role in supporting healthy blood metabolism. Not all forms are equally effective; chromium nicotinate and chromium picolinate demonstrate higher activity.

**Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10):** Used to generate cellular

### LIFESTYLE BEATS GENES

A *Journal of Internal Medicine* study shows that our own actions are more important than inherited factors in determining how long we live. Researchers from the University of Gothenburg found that people still living at age 90 were likelier at age 50 to have been non-smokers, drink coffee moderately, and have lower serum

cholesterol levels. The age attained by their parents did not appear to influence their own longevity. "Many of these factors have previously just been identified as preventing cardiovascular disease," says lead researcher Lars Wilhelmsen. "But here we are showing for the first time that they are important to our survival in general."

energy. CoQ10 is vital if you are taking a statin medication to lower cholesterol. It is well accepted that these drugs severely deplete CoQ10 levels. Taken orally, CoQ10 can maximise energy output.

**Vitamin D3:** An important nutrient to cut your risk of premature death. In his ground-breaking book *The Vitamin D Solution. A Three-Step Strategy To Cure Our Most Common Health Problem* Michael F. Holick PhD, MD

advocates maintaining a blood level of 25-hydroxyvitamin D of at least 100–150 nmol/L.

**Lutein:** A plant-based pigment sourced naturally from the diet. In supplement form this powerful antioxidant can help to preserve eyesight by preventing damage to the delicate photoreceptor cells found within the macula of the eye.

**Phosphatidylserine (PS):** Protecting brain health requires early intervention decades before the symptoms of cognitive decline

According to a study in *Neuron*, taking extra magnesium may boost brain power and improve memory.

### QUIZ:

How well are you ageing? Discover your risk factors.

**1. Do you exercise more than four times a week?** There is little doubt exercise is a youth booster. Exercise improves strength, flexibility, cardiovascular fitness, bone density and mental function.

**2. Are you keen to learn new skills?** Studies show those who remain mentally active are more likely to avoid age-related cognitive decline. It's definitely a case of 'use or lose it'.

**3. Do you smoke?** Cigarettes contain a multitude of toxic compounds in every puff. One of the best ways to slow accelerated ageing is to quit smoking. It's never too late to kick the habit for good.

**4. Do you drink alcohol daily?** There is consistent evidence that regular alcohol intake increases disease. Alcohol places stress on the liver and

robs your body of nutrients. Save a tippie for special occasions or abstain completely.

**5. Do you sleep well?** When you don't sleep properly, your body does not get the required down time to rejuvenate. The first step is to eliminate the major sources of caffeine - tea, coffee and soft drinks.

**6. Do you eat sugary foods?** Diet plays a major role in longevity. Sugary foods lead to weight gain. Being overweight triggers so-called Western 'lifestyle diseases' such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

**7. Do you take vitamin supplements?** They are a healthy insurance policy, topping up what may be missing in your daily diet. Speak to your healthcare practitioner who can tailor a personalised nutritional prescription.

**8. Are you stressed?** Stress makes you feel tired and worn out. The busier you are, the more important it is to allow time to relax and bring focus to your life.

Exercise, meditation and yoga are powerful antidotes to stress.

**9. Are your hormones in balance?** The dynamic interplay of your hormones keeps you feeling young and vibrant. Stress, diet and environmental toxins can upset the balance, leading to mood swings, fatigue and weight gain.

**10. Do you have regular dental checks with a holistic dentist?** Root canals that harbour bacteria and toxic dental materials such as old mercury amalgam fillings can trigger an unwanted immune response in the body. Find a dentist who has a whole body approach to oral health. (Ed: See our story on holistic dentistry on page 82)

**11. Do you have osteoporosis?** Bone loss is accelerated by acidic foods such as alcohol, soft drinks, tea, coffee, and a high protein diet. Save bone strength naturally by eating a low acid diet high in plant-based foods and performing regular weight-bearing exercise.

**12. Do you drink enough water?** Water makes up more than two-thirds

**55** The percentage reduction in the risk of developing diabetes in people with optimal levels of vitamin D, according to a study in *Maturitas*.

appear. PS works well with brahmi (*Bacopa monniera*) and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*), two well known brain tonics to safeguard memory and learning.

**Probiotic formulations:** These help to top up the friendly bacteria normally found in the digestive system, and reduce gas and bloating. A combination of *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Bifidobacterium bifidum* and *Bifidobacterium lactis* is indicated in medically diagnosed irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

**Resveratrol:** Found in grape skins, grape juice and berries of the *Vaccinium* species, including blueberries, bilberries and cranberries. Resveratrol is a potent antioxidant that protects the body from harmful environmental toxins.

**Rhodiola rosea:** Considered a powerful tonic as it enhances physical endurance and mental clarity. This herb also demonstrates a remarkable ability to combat the negative effects of stress.

**Zizyphus spinosa:** A natural sedative to calm the nerves. It has long been used in traditional Chinese medicine to reduce fatigue that is related to chronically disturbed sleep. Taken at night, zizyphus promotes relaxation and improves sleep quality.



LOUISE O'CONNOR is a leading Australian naturopath and regular feature writer for *Nature & Health*. Louise is an advocate of a fresh organic diet and yoga to naturally enhance longevity. [www.natural-weightloss-programs.com](http://www.natural-weightloss-programs.com)

### NEED MORE INFO?

- **Life Extension** provides scientific information on longevity and anti-aging supplements. [www.lef.org](http://www.lef.org)
- **Natural News** is a public education site to empower individuals to make positive changes to their health. [www.naturalnews.com](http://www.naturalnews.com)
- **Science Daily** is a news website with breaking stories on the latest scientific discoveries regarding health. [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)
- **The Weston A. Price Foundation** is an online education foundation with the mission of disseminating accurate, science-based information on diet and health. [www.westonaprice.org](http://www.westonaprice.org)
- **The Vitamin D Council** is committed to educating the public on the serious impact that widespread vitamin D deficiencies are having on global health. [www.vitamindcouncil.org](http://www.vitamindcouncil.org)

