

# Centenarians' Numbers Growing

The centenarian tide is rising! According to the Pew Research Center, the world was home to nearly half a million centenarians (people ages 100 and older) in 2015, more than four times as many as in 1990.



And this growth is expected to accelerate. Projections suggest there will be 3.7 million centenarians across the globe in 2050. Since 1990, the population of those ages 80 and older – the oldest segments of the 65-plus population – has grown more rapidly than that of the younger segments, those ages 65-79, because of improved life expectancies among those 65 and older, Pew Research reported.

The United States currently has the greatest number of known centenarians of any nation with 53,364, according to the 2010 Census, or 17.3 per 100,000 people. In 2010 in the U.S., 82.8 percent of centenarians were female.

Would you like to know the secrets of living to be 100? Harvard Medical School's Dr. Thomas Peris and his colleagues studied 150 centenarians. The study revealed that the participants shared specific habits that helped them to be happy, minimize poor health and live long lives:

- **Lighten emotional loads.** Every person in the study showed low results when tested for levels of neuroticism. This means they did not exhibit unhealthy feelings of extreme anger, fear, anxiety, bitterness, jealousy or sadness. Such feelings can disturb heartbeats, reduce immune functioning and even accelerate the aging process. They all had the ability to shed emotional stress rather easily. They tended to be calm and collected during crises, and they easily adapted to changes in their environments. Their spiritual lives helped them to cope and even to grow stronger, regardless of the crises or traumatic experiences encountered.
- **Practice moderation.** While researchers found no specific foods that all the centenarians consumed, moderation was a key. About 80 percent said their current weights were close to what they had weighed their entire adult lives. Many ate moderate amounts of high-fat foods. Dr. Peris emphasized, however, that most of us can't afford such indulgences. He reported that the people in the study got away with it because of their genes, and most of us especially need to avoid trans-fatty acids – the hydrogenated fats commonly found in cookies, biscuits and margarine. Most of the centenarians did not consume alcohol or smoke, and they kept their sugar intake to a minimum. Most ate smaller meals more often, rather than two or three large meals a day.

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- **Exercise daily.** The large majority had been exercising daily for many years, with walking being the favorite activity. Apart from strengthening the heart and positively influencing other organs and muscles, walking improves balance and leg strength, which decreases the risk of falls and, consequently, debilitation and death among the elderly. The merits of regular exercise in terms of preventing or delaying chronic disease are well known. It also appears that any activity that prevents significant muscle loss can impact longevity.
- **Challenge your brain.** Even though senility and aging have long been thought to go hand in hand, the people in the study maintained most of their mental abilities and personalities. Throughout their lives, they engaged in activities that exercised different parts of their brains. They remained interested and curious, continuing to stretch and learn. Several had written autobiographies or were working on them. Many engaged in such things as painting, playing musical instruments and learning new languages.
- **Stay in touch with friends – and make new friends.** Despite the fact that most had outlived their spouses and closest friends, they never seemed to be alone. They maintained social contacts with people of all ages. Dr. Peris claims that the ability to attract people to you as you age is a critical survival factor – and a social network ensures help in times of need. Regular social contact can also lower potentially harmful hormones that are released by the body during stressful situations. The centenarians' positive attitudes and senses of humor played important roles in their personal magnetism.



The Bible presents growing old as a normal, natural part of life in this world. There is honor involved in the aging process, because growing old is usually accompanied by increased wisdom and experience.

*The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness*  
(Proverbs 16:31 NKJV).

*The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head*  
(Proverbs 20:29 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter