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Grow Younger, Live Longer: 10 Steps to Reverse Aging by Deepak Chopra, MD, and David Simon, MD

Review by Charles Elder, MD, MPH, FACP

The seemingly endless array of both conventional and alternative medicine self-help guides available in the popular press bewilders even the most savvy health care professionals. Patients, of course, find this informational landscape even more confusing and frequently bring with them into the examination room questions about what they have read or should read. One bestselling author of medical self-help guides is Deepak Chopra, MD, who for 15 years has written prolifically on behalf of the holistic care movement. Dr Chopra consistently produces work that is both sufficiently scientific for the professional community and adequately clear and readable for the lay community. His recent book, *Grow Younger, Live Longer*, written with David Simon, MD, represents a valuable addition to this library.

The book offers a pragmatic, step-by-step guide to natural health promotion and disease prevention. At the heart of Dr Chopra's program lies a premise expressed in the following quote from the book: "The 'normal' experience of the body and its aging is a con-

ditioned response—a habit of thinking and behavior. By changing your habits of thinking and behavior, you can change the experience of your body and its aging" (page 8).

Dr Chopra then goes on to detail a ten-step program for reprogramming one's consciousness and physiology, with the goal of appreciating "aging" as a process that can be not only decelerated, but indeed reversed.

In addition to his endocrinology training, Dr Chopra's background is in Ayurvedic medicine, the traditional health care system of India. Indeed, Ayurveda translates literally as "knowledge of lifespan" and represents an ancient and sophisticated science of longevity. Dr Chopra devotes an entire chapter to each of ten separate action steps (see sidebar) that collectively span a broad range of Ayurvedic self-care modalities, including meditation, diet, exercise, daily routine, yoga, nutritional supplements, and detoxification. The first page of each chapter details specific, practical implementation points encompassed by the action step. In the body of the chapter, the author elucidates supporting theory and implementation guidelines for each of these ten points. The result is a pragmatic, informative, concise "how-to" manual for integrating holistic medicine into modern life.

For example, in the chapter about enhancing mind-body integration (action step 5), Dr Chopra describes three implementation points: performing breathing techniques, performing yoga, and practicing body awareness. The remainder of the chapter provides practical details for doing these techniques. The author gives specific instructions for doing three different types of conscious breathing exercises: an "energizing" technique for invigoration, a "soothing" technique to help relieve irritation and frustration, and a "relaxing" technique to help relieve anxiety. The section on yoga includes excellent diagrams with clear instructions for learning the 12 "sun salutation" yoga positions.

Dr Chopra is at his best where he weaves his authentic knowledge and appreciation of Ayurvedic wisdom into inspiring and practical advice. For example, he begins the chapter on "Cultivating Flexibility and Creativity" (action step 8) by describing in terms of Ayurvedic theory the threefold fundamental forces

Following are the ten "action steps" detailed by Dr Deepak Chopra in *Grow Younger, Live Longer*:

1. I am reversing my biological age by changing my perceptions of my body, its aging, and of time.
2. I am reversing my biological age through two kinds of deep rest—restful awareness and restful sleep.
3. I am reversing my biological age by lovingly nurturing my body through healthy food.
4. I am reversing my biological age by taking nutritional complements that have a direct effect on the prevention of illness.
5. I am reversing my biological age by enhancing mind/body integration.
6. I am reversing my biological age through regular exercise.
7. I am reversing my biological age by eliminating toxins from my physical and emotional bodies.
8. I am reversing my biological age by cultivating flexibility and creativity in my consciousness.
9. I am reversing my biological age by making love the most important thing in my life.
10. I am reversing my biological age by maintaining a youthful mind.

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influencing the mind: the evolutionary, the stagnant, and the tension between these two. Against this backdrop, Dr Chopra emphasizes the importance of maintaining spiritual and mental flexibility by letting go of negative experiences and emotions. According to Dr Chopra, attachment to negativity—and, indeed, attachment to any material outcome—accelerates aging and impedes progress in life and self-development. Stated another way, if you are attached, you cannot move forward. Detachment implies having the flexibility to absorb personal development and change and allow nature's evolutionary intelligence to guide one's destiny.

Although the book draws heavily from Dr Chopra's Ayurvedic roots, it does not serve as an introduction, or guide, to Ayurveda. Many fundamental Ayurvedic principles (most notably, "Tri-Dosha" theory) are not mentioned at all. This approach is not a fault in and of itself, yet we must acknowledge that Dr Chopra's work

grows progressively more eclectic as the years go by. In *Grow Younger, Live Longer*, the author steers back and forth from Ayurveda to Chinese Medicine, to Western Herbalism, and so on. In addition, Dr Chopra sometimes contradicts Ayurvedic thought altogether. Dr Chopra's knowledge of Ayurvedic tradition and wisdom is undoubtedly authentic, but his work has been the subject of some controversy: Can readers truly achieve meaningful vision and understanding through the eclectic lens that he offers?

On balance, health care professionals can expect to find in *Grow Younger, Live Longer* not only a compelling and enjoyable introduction to holistic medicine but, more important, a practical and balanced approach to growing younger and living longer. This is an excellent book to recommend to patients interested in natural health care. Dr Chopra is a skilled writer who remains among the most eloquent spokesmen on behalf of the holistic medicine movement. ❖

The Sacred Garment

The body is a sacred garment. It's your first and last garment; it is what you enter life in and what you depart life with, and it should be treated with honor.

— Martha Graham, 1894–1991, choreographer