



Painting the Rainbow Newsletter

<http://www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk>

Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel

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I was talking to somebody recently and was telling them that our oldest student is 104 and very lively. As we discussed how some people seem to be born old and others never age, I remembered an article I'd read by Sir Muir Gray, and I thought I'd share elements with you.

Goodbye to getting old!

Recently, I attended the 100th birthday party of a friend. His choice of present? An iPad.

At the party, the 'birthday boy' gave a wonderful speech saying, among other things, that he'd just flown for the first time to Israel and fulfilled a long-held ambition to swim in the Dead Sea.

Of course, it's exceptional to be this lively at the age of 100. But, these days, provided we're relatively free from the debilitating effects of disease, there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to live independently well into our nineties, as well as still take trains and buses, drive a car and enjoy going for walks.

So how is it that we all know some people who seem 'old' beyond their years — yet others seem to have a Dorian Gray-style portrait in the attic and barely age at all? After all, there's no denying that the ageing process exists. Once we peak, we must all face a very gradual physical decline. Even for top sportsmen, at the summit of physical fitness, the ageing process will soon start to kick in, by reducing by 1% every year the maximum rate at which the heart can beat. This may sound a lot. But even at the age of 70, if you're otherwise fit, you'd probably only notice the difference if you tried to exercise flat-out to the absolute limit. (And I wouldn't advise trying that.)

The truth is that most of the limitations that older people experience are not caused by ageing itself — but by the

way people choose to live their lives as they grow old.

And the good news is that with a few simple tweaks to your lifestyle, you can help reduce those limitations — allowing you to defy the years by staying healthy and active right into your 70s and beyond.

As Professor Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer for England, puts it: "We now know that we can postpone many problems that we have assumed to be due to ageing but which well-designed research now proves to be due to loss of fitness, preventable disease and loss of morale".

Here are some simple tips I use myself and can vouch for the way they have helped me continue to lead a full and active life into my eighth decade.

HOW TO AVOID TRIPS AND FALLS

Our sense of balance gets worse as we age, partly because of deterioration in the inner ear

As a doctor, I believe that the most important skill to maintain and improve in older age is the ability to keep upright.

It may not seem important to you right now — but falls can increase in frequency after the age of 70, and most occur in the home. There are three main culprits, apart from hazards such as rugs and poor lighting.

Our sense of balance gets worse as we age, partly because of a deterioration in the inner ear; our muscles get weaker; and we start losing our ability to coordinate all the actions needed to steady ourselves.



So it's extremely important to build balance exercises into your routine — long before you think you're at risk. Here's a simple one you can do every day:

- Stand up straight with your feet together, shoulders down, chest lifted, abdominal muscles braced and your weight evenly distributed on both feet. Focus on a spot straight ahead.
- Lift your right foot six inches off the floor, bending your knee slightly, and balance on your left leg. Remember to breathe normally.
- Hold this position for as long as you can — aim for ten seconds.
- Repeat with your left leg. If possible, repeat three times.
- Increase the amount of time you stand on one leg every week. You'll see a swift improvement.
- You can also increase the challenge by closing your eyes, standing on an uneven surface (a crumpled towel, for example), and waving your lifted leg in the air. Stand near a chair or table to hold on to if you sway too much.
- Tip: to make the exercise part of your daily routine, stand on one leg every time you brush your teeth and gums.

Look After Your Brain

As you grow older, there are certain changes that take place to the brain that are an inevitable result of ageing but as yet there is no medical treatment that can stop or slow them. Moreover, unlike most other tissues in the body, such as the skin and the liver, our brain cells cannot divide after birth. Therefore, while liver cells can increase if part of the liver is

damaged or removed during an operation, brain cells cannot. This means that just as a classic car needs more attention than a new car to stay in good condition, so too the older brain requires a bit more looking after.

We'll look more at exercises that can specifically help improve your memory, but taking the following precautions to protect the brain itself is just as important. This means:

- Stop smoking: it's never too late to free yourself, and is one of the single greatest changes you can make to improve the health of your brain.
- Cutting back on alcohol. Once you reach 70, you should have at least three days a week without any alcohol at all.
- Get walking and learn tai chi — I really can't say it often enough. As well as improving your general fitness, this has a direct beneficial effect on the brain tissue.

Don't walk Like a Tortoise

Whatever exercise you choose, be conscious of your posture. We've all seen those insulting road traffic signs that show stooped couples crossing – and it's all too easy to let your head and shoulders lean forward, like a tortoise. So stand tall!! Don't stick your chin out but stand 'as if suspended from above' by a thread from the crown of your head. Maybe even try those Nordic walking sticks as they reduce the risk of falling and promote use of your whole body when walking. Good for unwanted dog attention too. Tai Chi focuses heavily on being upright, and builds your spatial awareness, so is ideal.



Part 2 next issue....

PEARLS OF WISDOM ADVICE FROM MY MOTHER!



My mom passed away age 97 years. She was not an intellectual in the strict sense of the word, but I think she gave me advice to get through life in a much easier to use scenario than it would have been if she was.

Although nothing to do with Tai Chi I thought I would share them with you as the newsletter can always use good common sense and humour:

1. The world values you at your OWN valuation. (always be confident of your ability to succeed in whatever you want in life, and let others see it.)
2. If money becomes the most important thing in your life you will never be truly happy (or rich)
3. Never envy anyone anything.
4. Never tell lies, especially if you haven't a good memory!
5. Always help older people (she encouraged me to carry elderly neighbours shopping home for them from a really young age,) and this empathy with the older person has stayed with me.
6. You need to keep mobile, it keeps you alive and healthy.
7. Never spoil a child, no one likes spoilt children.
8. If you cannot afford to pay cash for something, Don't have it! Save up, then get it.
9. If a man ever goes to hit you, hit him FIRST!
10. Don't examine relationships too closely; you will just get more confused! (advise she gave my daughter when she asked her for advice and opinion on a new boyfriend)

And to finish, 2 more gems I love— After watching a James Bond film in her 90s she turned to me and said “I think he is a bit promiscuous, don't you!” “Don't wash your hair when you have your period, it will send you mad!” Obviously I did not take heed to that one” Please share with us advice from your mom.... I look forward to reading and sharing it.
Jenny Peters



HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM YOUR BRAIN

DAYDREAMING rests parts of the brain that do analytical or repetitive work. Indulging in daydreaming at least ten times a day gives you a chance to integrate your thoughts.

SEEK OUT SILENCE. At least ten minutes of silence a day gives your brain a break from its normal non-stop activity. Claude Debussy said: “Music is the silence between the notes.”

TELL and be told stories. They are great for your creative imagination.

IMPROVE your social intelligence by asking and learning to listen.



A PIANIST'S TOUCH

(thoughts on powers of relaxation)
Claudio Arrau the great pianist (1903-1991), a native of Chile, was a child prodigy who had his debut at the age of five. Known as a remarkably thorough and expressive musician, he kept to a rigorous practice and touring schedule his whole life. Arrau spent years carefully analyzing the movements involved in piano-playing. He advocated keeping relaxed and letting the weight of the body and gravity do most of the work. Arrau was able to practice for up to fourteen hours a day without fatigue, in part due to his ability to keep relaxed. In an interview late in life Arrau said, “If you keep your body relaxed, the body is in contact with the depths of your soul. If you are stiff in any joint, you impede the current, the emotion, the physical current——what the music itself dictates to you——if you are not relaxed, you won't be able to let it go through into the keyboard.