



The Patients' Voice

Patients for Alternative Medicine

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Methuselah's Legacy: Anti-aging vs Optimal Aging By Gary Piscopo, ND, LAc

Not many topics have preoccupied human beings more powerfully than the issue of aging or, more often, the pursuit of youth. People are living longer, a fact that is globally and tremendously affecting every social institution from art to medicine to economics. On a more personal level, however, most people are more concerned with *quality* of life rather than the quantity of years they live. Currently, there is a great deal of confusion about how best to ensure this quality of life in one's later years. Two positions are emerging within medicine about how to address this issue. These can be called the anti-aging position and the optimal aging position.

ANTI-AGING

The term "anti-aging" has no clear definition. Because of this, it has been adopted by advocates ranging from stem cell researchers and patient advocacy groups, to transhumanists, cryogenic practitioners, and infomercial supplement vendors. In medicine, it appears to define a position that claims it is possible to slow, stop, or reverse the aging process through current medical or scientific approaches. This claim is controversial amongst gerontologist who study the aging process.

The term "anti" means to oppose and there is a strong disposition in the anti-aging community to see aging as an opponent or enemy. Sadly, when this approach is combined with predatory business practices, fraudulent and potentially dangerous approaches and products result. This is unfortunate because it undermines the credibility of legitimate avenues of inquiry within the anti-aging community. Here are some things to keep in mind when evaluating anti-aging interventions:

Claims that current products or services slow, stop, or reverse aging are false

There are no legitimate medical or scientific interventions that can currently affect the aging process itself, either to slow or reverse it. There are a number of interventions that can improve the quality of life or increase life expectancy, but these work at the level of addressing age-related diseases or compromised physiology – not the underlying process of aging. Likewise, there are a number of products

that mask age-related changes, but obviously they do not effect either one's physiology or the aging process.

The process of aging is not genetically programmed

No gene has ever been identified that activates aging or death in the human organism. While it is true that genes are intimately involved with influencing human longevity, there is no such thing as a "death gene," just as people who build airplanes do not program them to self-destruct. The breakdown of the human body on the molecular level occurs because the energy for its maintenance and repair is not infinite. Therefore, products or treatments that claim to reverse aging by influencing genetics should not be trusted.

Hormones are not the fountain of youth

Substances such as testosterone, estrogen, growth hormone, and progesterone have been shown to improve physiological changes associated with human aging, but no hormone has ever been shown to stop, slow, or reverse the aging process itself. More importantly, just because hormones are "natural" does not mean they are safe at any dose. Indiscriminant use of hormones can be dangerous, which was graphically demonstrated when thousands of women discovered that Prempro (Premarin) significantly increased their risk of stroke, blood clots, endometrial cancer, and breast cancer.

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