

Experts say slowing aging is way to fight diseases in 21st century

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A group of aging experts from the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that the best strategy for preventing and fighting a multitude of diseases is to focus on slowing the biological processes of aging. The analysis is published on BMJ.com.

"The traditional medical approach of attacking individual diseases -- cancer, diabetes, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease -- will soon become less effective if we do not determine how all of these diseases either interact or share common mechanisms with aging," says S. Jay Olshansky, professor of epidemiology at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health and senior author of the commentary.

Middle-aged and older people are most often impacted by simultaneous but independent medical conditions. A cure for any of the major fatal diseases would have only a marginal impact on life expectancy and the length of healthy life, Olshansky said.

The authors suggest that a new paradigm of health promotion and disease prevention could produce unprecedented social, economic and health dividends for current and future generations if the aging population is provided with extended years of healthy life.

They note that all living things, including humans, possess biochemical mechanisms that influence how quickly we age and, through dietary intervention or genetic alteration, it is possible to extend lifespan to

postpone aging-related processes and diseases.

Further research in laboratory models is expected to provide clues and deeper understanding of how existing interventions, such as exercise and good nutrition, may lead to lifelong well-being.

The authors also propose greatly increased funding for basic research into the "fundamental cellular and physiological changes that drive aging itself."

"We believe that the potential benefits of slowing aging processes have been underrecognized by most of the scientific community," said Olshansky. "We call on the health-research decision-makers to allocate substantial resources to support and develop practical interventions that slow aging in people."

An increase in age-related diseases and escalating health care costs makes this the time for a "systematic attack on aging itself," the authors write.

Olshansky and colleagues contend that modern medicine is already heavily invested in efforts to extend life, and they argue that a fresh emphasis on aging has the potential to improve health and quality of life far more efficiently than is currently possible.

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago

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