

## FOUR SECRETS TO HEALTHY AGING

Years ago, I came across someone with a thick Irish accent. He asked me to guess his age. He was working full time in a physically-active trade. I saw in him someone who was nimble, energetic and resourceful. He seemed to have a *can do* attitude and a positive attitude to problem solving. Yet he attributed the success of his solutions to the *luck of the Irish*. His hair had the soft-grey sheen of someone in their 50s. His body was slim and lean. Only his skin belied his otherwise youthful appearance. I placed him in his 50s.

He proudly answered that he was turning 70 later that year and that his dad was a healthy 91. He said his dad was always happy to wake up on 'this side of the grass'. Both he and his father took the attitude that you should always let the child within come out to play at least once a day. Based on this person's sense of humour, the 'once' may span from the time he wakes up to the time he falls asleep. What a fantastic way to live your life.

My conversation with this person reminded me of the research on healthy aging. The research recognises the importance of four key factors to aging well.

- **Social Interactions:** We all benefit from human contact, be it through personal or professional relationships, family or friends. The benefit of social interactions seems to lie in the caring support we provide one another.
- **Exercise for the body:** It is beneficial to exercise at least 30 minutes daily. Exercise is more sustainable if we incorporate it naturalistically into our way of life. Irrespective of whether we include it in our lives naturalistically or formally set aside time to exercise, we will find that we look, feel and act biologically younger than our more sedentary same-aged peers.
- **Exercise for the mind:** Our minds naturally 'grow' in whatever way we use them and 'wither away' in areas that we do not attend to. The old adage of *use it or lose it* is very true as far as our minds are concerned. Thus the most beneficial forms of exercise vary across a range of activities. If we have intellectually stimulating work or hobbies, especially where we solve a range of problems as part of our working day, we may already be exercising our minds. Other mind exercises include scrabble, sudoku, crossword puzzles, memory games, learning a language, instrument or dance routine.
- **Omega III:** Omega III benefits both mind and body. It keeps our joints well-lubricated. It also keeps our brain neurons firing well. If you like fish, then you are probably getting the benefits of Omega III naturally. If not, you can obtain the same benefits through supplements.

I don't know about this particular person's intake of Omega III, but it certainly appears that he has ticked off the first three factors naturalistically. The message for the rest of us is that by maintaining social contacts, exercising both mind and body and including Omega III in our diets, we can be biologically younger than our same-aged peers. While we are at it, why not let our own inner child come out to play.

At the end of the day, we can all enjoy the luck of the Irish.

