



Autism FILE™

FEB-MAR 2015
ISSUE 60

Providing Hope and Help for Autism Families

Fearing Foreclosure?

Strategies for keeping your home despite the high cost of autism

Chalking it All Up

How art festivals are making a difference for autism

Trace Amounts

New documentary highlights health risks from mercury exposure



AGING GRACEFULLY?



Even if you haven't adopted healthy habits at this point in life, it's never too late to get started

BY DEIRDRE IMUS

As the saying goes, life has few certainties. There is, however, one thing I know for sure, and it is happening to all of us at this very moment: we're getting older. You're older now than when you started reading this sentence. You're younger now than you will be when you finish reading this article. It's okay—we're going to get through it together.

Let me be clear: just because we're getting older does not mean we are old. And when did aging get such a bad rap, anyway? I embrace each year of my life with gusto, keenly aware that countless people on this planet would give literally anything to live as long as I have. Working with chronically, critically ill children for the better part of two decades will do that to a person.

We're not a country that likes to age gracefully. We fill our skin with toxins to avoid wrinkles, dye our hair to hide grays, lie about our real birthdays, wear

age-inappropriate clothing, and complain to anyone who will listen about our aches and pains and how tired we are. The unfortunate side effects of living a long life is that it increases your risk for a slew of health problems.

The silver lining (and no, I'm not talking about your shoddy dye job) is that the majority of health conditions associated with age—cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and others—are avoidable if you start taking care of yourself now. If you're already coping with one or more chronic diseases, changing bad habits can prevent you from feeling as bad as you do now—or from feeling worse.

SETTING EXAMPLES

Another reason to consider your health as you get older (and maybe, in the end, the only reason) is because taking care of kids is hard—but taking care of kids is much harder when you don't feel well.

Taking care of kids requires energy, stamina, and when possible, a positive outlook, whether they're on the autism spectrum or not. If illness or injury limits your ability to be active and involved with your kids, everybody loses.

We constantly try to set examples for our children, whether by teaching them good manners, right from wrong, the value of education, kindness, empathy, openness, and so much more. Following a healthy lifestyle—through diet, exercise, and other means—is no exception. If we eat poorly and laze in front of the television for hours on end, our children won't recognize these behaviors as detrimental to their own health—and they'll do them too.

A study published in 2014 in the journal *Gerontology* found that even in cases when obese children lost weight, the health effects of childhood obesity are long-lasting and profound. As the study's senior author Dr. Kristen Nadeau pointed out in a press release, the earlier people “start the ball rolling” on obesity, the earlier complications like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, liver disease, asthma, infertility, and many other conditions can take root, and eventually emerge.

Dr. Nadeau's research also showed that childhood obesity might just

DEIRDRE IMUS...



...**National Leader for Children's Health and the Environment** Deirdre Imus, founder of the site devoted to environmental health, www.imusenvironmentalhealth.org, is President and Founder of The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center® at Hackensack University Medical Center and Co-Founder/Co-Director of the [Imus Cattle Ranch for Kids with Cancer](#). She is a *New York Times* best-selling author and a frequent contributor to FoxNewsHealth.com, and Fox Business Channel. In her quest to clean up the environment for our kids, Deirdre developed the award-winning Greening The Cleaning® program and product line, which replaces the hazardous ingredients commonly found in cleaning agents with environmentally-responsible, less toxic ingredients whenever possible. The program and products are used throughout the country in schools, healthcare facilities, and businesses. ◀

change a person's metabolism during a very critical developmental time frame. She observed that childhood obesity "doesn't just go away," and is very difficult to cure once it is established.

POSITIVE HABITS

From the moment they are born, everything we do is for our children. If you establish positive habits, chances are they'll do the same: research published in September of 2014 found that taste preferences develop in infancy, and last at least until age six. There is plenty about the future you can't control, but there are a number of steps you can take to lower the odds that you or your kids will be among the half of all adults in this country afflicted with a chronic disease.

According to 2010 data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cancer and heart disease account for nearly half (48 percent) of all deaths among Americans. They are chronic, debilitating, devastating, costly diseases. They are also, in many cases, avoidable.

People over 65 years of age are 11 times more likely than younger individuals to develop cancer, as the Johns Hopkins Geriatric Education Center Consortium notes on its website. Sometimes this is the result of bad luck, but more likely it is because of age-related changes in molecular, cellular, and physiologic processes. The longer we live, the more time we give our cells to make the changes that may lead to cancer.

But cellular health does not have to deteriorate with age. Perhaps you've heard you should eat more berries, beans and broccoli because they're packed with antioxidants. These natural compounds help neutralize free radicals in our bodies, which is a fancy way of saying antioxidants block free radicals (which form naturally in the body) from damaging cells in the body—damage that can lead to cancer and other health problems.

GET MOVING!

Exercise is also a key component of cancer prevention: The National

Cancer Institute notes there is strong evidence that physical activity reduces a person's risk of colon and breast cancers. Links have also been reported between exercise and a lower risk of endometrial, lung, and prostate cancers. Exercise can decrease the side effects of anticancer therapy, and aid in recovery and rehabilitation following chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, according to a review published in the June 2013 edition of the journal *Oncology*.

Fittingly, exercise plays a huge role in preventing, treating, and recovering from the other leading cause of death in this country: heart disease. Even if you've never exercised a day in your life, starting a new program in your 30s or 40s is not too late. A study published last summer found that coronary artery disease can be controlled and reversed even if healthy habits aren't adopted until a bit later in life.

The enduring benefits of exercise are real and they are plentiful. Not only can it help prevent heart disease and cancer, but it reduces your risk for type II diabetes (another condition that becomes more common with age), but it also strengthens your bones and muscles. This helps guard against osteoporosis, eases the pain of arthritis, and improves balance, which is a key factor in why people are more likely to fall (and break a hip) as they get older.

STRESS-BUSTERS

Regular physical activity also improves your mental health and mood, which might seem like small potatoes compared to all its other amazing powers, but keeping ourselves happy as we get older is a difficult task. For most of us, life only becomes more complicated, and usually more stressful. Whether you're caring for a child on the autism spectrum or a sick parent, common stressors can overwhelm to the point of depression. Sometimes, life spirals

out of control despite our best efforts to the contrary.

If you think you might be depressed, seek help immediately. You wouldn't wait to see a doctor if you thought you had the flu, right? As far as I'm concerned, there is little difference between treating a physical and a mental illness. Both are incredibly common, and entirely treatable—but only if you acknowledge their existence.

The power of positive thinking is real. It can help you manage stress,



▲ **EMBRACE EXERCISE**—An active lifestyle strengthens the body and reduces stress, while boosting your spirits.

reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease, and even ward off the common cold, according to The Mayo Clinic. It's why I choose to embrace each new and advancing year of my life as a gift. Like anything precious, I handle it with care by eating an organic plant-based diet, staying active, avoiding environmental toxins, holding my loved ones tight, and delighting in the natural beauty of this gorgeous planet as often as I can, for as long as it will have me. ◀

Note: Information provided herein is not intended to treat or diagnose any health condition. As always, consult your healthcare provider with any questions or health concerns.