

HEALTH

How to feel and look younger — the healthy way

You're not ill, you are just exhausted. Dr Duncan Carmichael, an anti-ageing specialist, explains how you can get your energy back

Dr Duncan Carmichael | Anna Maxted

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Health



Vitamin B5 is a vital skin hydrator and good for dry skin
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“Exhausted but not ill” is a common health profile of those who seek advice from Duncan Carmichael, 51, a medical doctor for 25 years and the founder of the Institute of Healthy Ageing in Poole, Dorset. “They're fatigued or their mood is low, their partners complain that they're irritable, and they want to know what's going on.”

These stressed, over-busy patients “fall through the cracks”, he says, because the medical world is focused on treating illness rather than promoting health. But Carmichael, who qualified in medicine in his native South Africa and worked extensively in psychiatry before acquiring his GP qualifications in the UK, takes a wider view.

He has studied nutrition, hormone balancing and aesthetic medicine, and his passion, on which he lectures globally, is healthy ageing. His approach in his fascinating new book, *Younger for Longer*, is scientific and holistic.

He starts by asking his patients about sleep. “Everything hinges on sleep.” Hours, quality, reasons for waking. “After sleep, it's how energised are they during the day? Then we'd look at their immune system — do they get coughs, colds, allergies, joint stiffnesses? Each bunch of questions tells a different story.”

A woman in her late forties might need menopausal and adrenal hormones measured and, if her mood is low, serotonin. Cholesterols and sugars are also assessed. A full blood count to reveal bone marrow health can be “a nice test of how subtly exhausted your system is”.



Stuffed with

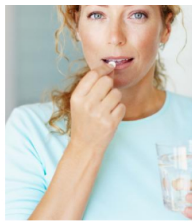
Men are usually exhausted (low libido, low mood) or seemingly inexhaustible: “Imagine your robust lawyer — big belly, life and soul.” The first type's hormones are stress-depleted, and “their liver's starting to get fatty, their cholesterol and sugar's going up”. The second type's hormones are dangerously high, increasing their heart-attack risk.

Carmichael may prescribe hormones for six months to correct deficiencies, but it's always the patient's decision. He knows that many fear “that I'm going to tell them to do something and they have to do it. That's very old-school medicine.” He gives his patients his opinion on what they could do to slow ageing and regain health, and they choose a course of action that resonates. *Younger for Longer* also shows you how. Below are Dr Carmichael's six key points. **Anna Maxted**



Top five supplements

Many patients arrive at my clinic in Dorset or Cape Town with a sack of vitamin pills in tow.



Try a high-quality multivitamin
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They'll pour them on to the desk and ask which ones are important because it's very confusing. Indeed, advertising can give the impression that many of these supplements bestow eternal life, so it's no wonder we end up rattling. Many of us are deficient in certain nutrients, but taking too many supplements risks turning off our internal antioxidant system, so we need to be careful. I recommend a maximum of five excellent supplements, all of which provide powerful benefits.

1 Glutathione

This relatively unknown supplement gets my gold medal. It stops inflammation in the brain, reducing the chance of Alzheimer's, is calming and aids removal of mercury and other toxins via the liver — depleted by drinking alcohol or inhaling polluted air.

2 Fish oil

Look for 1,000mg tablets of cold-pressed fish oil — heat damages it — and ensure that 500mg are comprised of the omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA, which help to reduce inflammation.

3 Vitamin D3

Pulls calcium into our bones, helps our liver's detoxification pathways, boosts the immune system, is involved in making dopamine and is protective against skin cancers.

4 Coenzyme Q10

This enzyme is essential to enable our cells to make energy, but declines from about age 35 along with our mitochondria (energy engines inside each cell), increasing fatigue. Taking coenzyme Q10 will also protect our DNA from damage.

5 High-quality multivitamin

To be taken twice weekly, for example Solgar VM-2000.

The secrets of young skin

Five elements make skin look old. Thanks to declining levels of the enzyme cathepsin-D, which stimulates the cell turnover process, dead cells accumulate, giving the skin a rough, dull appearance. Pigment cells clump together, causing a mottled effect. Collagen — the skin's scaffolding — depletes, leading to fine wrinkles. Hyaluronic acid levels decline, drying out our skin. And finally, the fatty layer below the dermis, which also contains collagen, dwindles, causing deep wrinkles and sagging. So how can we promote younger-looking skin?

- Vitamin C serum — not only does it protect our skin from photo-ageing, it stimulates the formulation of fibroblasts, cells that build collagen and repair damage. I recommend using vitamin C serum for two weeks, then resting for a week. Crucially, this will prevent your internal antioxidant system (the superoxide dismutase or SOD system, which protects against free radical damage) from becoming lazy.
- Alpha-lipoic acid is a powerful antioxidant. It's thought to stimulate collagen and clear away damaging particles in the skin. Most usefully, it helps to reverse glycation (when sugar molecules bond to proteins — for instance, collagen — causing the skin to harden, as in a middle-aged smoker's top lip). A quality alpha-lipoic acid skin serum, applied nightly for three months, can reverse much of the damage. (NB drinking green tea, eating berries, avoiding charred food and, if you fry food, using an oil with a high smoke point also help in the battle against glycation.)
- Vitamin A cream has been shown to counteract the ageing effects of sun damage, but can leave skin looking irritated and dried out, so use it in a less powerful form; ideally, retinol or retinol palmitate, which are gentler on the skin.
- Vitamin B5 — a vital skin hydrator, particularly good for dry skin.
- A fine derma-roller — for home use. It has dozens of fine needles that lightly puncture the skin and causes an inflammatory response that stimulates the fibroblasts to build more collagen.

Why you can't lose weight

For a long time we failed to spot that "low fat" meant "high sugar". Even now, we underestimate how much sugar our food contains. It's omnipresent and addictive — sleep deprivation, stress and sadness increase our cravings for it.

A sudden dump of sugar (from, say, a chocolate brownie that quickly breaks down into glucose) requires a big insulin release. Some glucose is used as energy, but insulin pushes the excess into cells and parcels it up with fatty acids into a compound called a triglyceride. These are stored in fat cells until needed, then the triglycerides are unwrapped into their two components via a beta-receptor and we lose our love handles.

However, if we eat too much sugar, it and our developing fat stores cause low-grade inflammation. Our inflamed arteries slow the clearing of glucose from the blood and into the cells. So the pancreas generates more insulin. The excess insulin prevents the beta-receptors from allowing us to access that stored fat for energy, meaning we can't lose weight. The pathologist Joseph Kraft, the author

of *Diabetes Epidemic & You*, found that in 80 per cent of people insulin lingers in the arteries for hours longer than it should.

Intermittent fasting

Mild insulin resistance is not an illness, but we should address it to optimise our health. Exercise and drinking a cup of coffee trigger the beta-receptors. As does fasting. Reducing sugary carbohydrates is the best option for reducing insulin resistance. (Insulin resistance increases the risk of heart attack, diabetes, cancer and other inflammatory diseases.)

Scientists believe that if we were to cut calorie intake by 30 per cent from the age of 30, we would add seven years to our life, but that's a big ask. Another option is intermittent fasting. This typically involves delaying breakfast until 11am, after eating your last meal at 7pm the previous evening. So your "fasting" period is 16 hours. This mimics calorie restriction, reduces insulin resistance and leads to weight loss.

Stress and cortisol

Continuous stress can lead to an excess or lack of cortisol. Too much means raised sugar levels, increased abdominal fat, muscle-wasting, thinning skin, wrinkles, weakened bones and lowered immunity. Too little leads to weakened immunity and inflammation.

Can you make an educated guess as to whether this is the case for you? In a medical practice we generally do a cortisol salivary test to confirm whether a patient's cortisol is running high or low. However, if you are stressed and you eat the same amount, do you gain or lose weight? If stress leads to excess cortisol, it can cause people to gain weight, particularly around the abdomen. Stress that depletes cortisol levels can often result in weight loss.

Also, if we burn through our cortisol stores with too much stress, we wake up with too little of it, so feel exhausted. Coffee gets us going. We run on adrenaline all day and drink alcohol to wind down. (This wears down our adrenals – like driving your car by alternately accelerating hard and slamming the brake.)

Cortisol, as part of the stress response, stimulates the brain so we think clearly, is anti-inflammatory so we don't feel pain if we need to fight, and releases glucose by squeezing it from the liver and also by telling the muscles to convert protein into glucose. If you produce too much, you can work relentlessly without falling ill – but you gain weight (because cortisol ensures a constant trickle of glucose into the bloodstream, and if this trickle becomes a flood, it's stored as fat). You increase your risk of heart attacks and strokes. In my clinic these are typically high-flying executives.

People with low cortisol, meanwhile, wake with some energy (our cortisol stores are replenished as we sleep), but tiredness hits before midday because their cortisol stores deplete, meaning no cortisol to instruct the liver to release glucose. They're at high risk of inflammatory diseases, including hay fever, arthritis and eczema, coughs and colds.



Improved sleeping habits can balance cortisol levels
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Balance your cortisol levels

If too high

- Reduce anxiety and irritability – this switches off the adrenal response. I advise regular exercise and mindful meditation. Break up the working day.
- Improve your sleep habits.
- Quit coffee and other stimulants – this reduces excessive cortisol production.
- Detoxify the liver (cortisol is removed via the liver) by drinking less or no alcohol.
- Eat fewer starchy carbohydrates – they convert to glucose.

If too low

- Reduce anxiety – again, through meditation and exercise, shorter office hours, spending time in nature.
- Improve sleep – aim for eight hours (easier said, I know.) Eat early and avoid excessive exercise in the evening because this boosts cortisol and wakes you up.
- Quit coffee and similar stimulants (have decaf if you must) because they burn up our cortisol store.
- Consider supplements – despite a lack of convincing research, my patients report good results from using B vitamins, pan ginseng, ashwagandha, Cordyceps mycelium and rhodiola. Licorice Plus by Metagenics works by keeping cortisol in the body for longer.

Five easy ways to reduce your toxic load

A toxin is simply something that damages the body, be it alcohol, car exhaust fumes or chemicals that leach from certain cleaning products. Our bodies have an amazing detoxification system and do a great job of removing dangerous substances, typically via the liver, but we can help ourselves by reducing our exposure to some of the toxins we commonly encounter.

- Volatile organic compounds, found in, for instance, memory-foam pillows, are believed to be carcinogenic. Use pillows filled with wool or down.
- In 2011 the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified the radio-frequency electromagnetic fields emitted by wireless devices such as mobile phones as “possibly carcinogenic” for a form of brain tumour. More research is needed, but I suggest switching off the wifi at night, using a hands-free mobile rather than pressing it to your ear, and avoiding Bluetooth headphones.
- Use a high-quality filter on your drinking water tap (high levels of chlorine can irritate the bowel and prostate).
- Don't microwave food in plastic because it releases dioxins and Bisphenol A, chemicals that interfere with our endocrine system by mimicking oestrogen.
- Choose preservative-free beauty products – parabens are endocrine disruptors.

Boost your natural protection





We once believed that the more antioxidants we took – such as vitamins A, C and E – the better our protection against inflammation because they would neutralise the damaging molecules in our body called free radicals. Yet the body makes its own antioxidants – SOD – and exercise such as running or lifting weights causes temporary inflammation, which increases SOD activity.

It turns out we need a certain level of free radicals to encourage muscle repair and cell growth. Therefore, flooding the body with antioxidants is probably counterproductive. So I advise against taking daily high-dose antioxidants.

***Younger for Longer: How You Can Slow the Ageing Process and Stay Healthy for Life* by Dr Duncan Carmichael is published by Robinson, £13.99**


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 **sandy lancaster** 12 DECEMBER | Edited



Didn't mention the use of a broad spectrum spf ...isn't that THE basic way to stop aging sun damage to your skin.

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 **Ziena** 13 DECEMBER |  sandy lancaster




Absolutely


 Reply  Recommend  Report

 **dasher** 15 DECEMBER |  sandy lancaster




But a sunscreen probably carries quite a toxic load. What about the effect of a lot of synthetic chemicals that encourage some to sit in hot sun for long periods: could this cause the spf to heat up and perhaps leach via our skin into our systems?


My preference was to wear sun proof clothing, or to remain in shade, or to avoid the strongest sun.

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 **Amanda** 12 DECEMBER




The only way to look younger (rather than feel younger) is to stop looking in the mirror or cover the mirrors with pics of yourself in your 20s.


 Reply  Recommend  Report

 **sam shah** 12 DECEMBER

"Eat fewer starchy carbohydrates – they convert to glucose."

ALL carbohydrates convert to glucose! Basic biochemistry! But if this doctor doesn't know that...

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 **L.Spencer** 12 DECEMBER

There are a few common-sense ideas in this article that we could all follow. Recently, sick of feeling exhausted all the time and not sleeping well, I went to the GP who ran some blood tests. Simple result was that I am anaemic and so an iron tablet was prescribed and, hey presto!, a few weeks later I am feeling 100% better.

Multi vitamins with iron and good face cream can certainly help the ageing process. And get a dog. We clocked up an 8k walk today.

Reply 7 Recommend Report

B Beak Wiskins 11 DECEMBER

Fresh air, walking outside (dress in appropriate clothing if it's cold or wet) and a holiday alone or with someone you really like (not necessarily a partner/spouse). You aren't going to make yourself look younger but you will feel better.

Reply 8 Recommend Report

C ConcernedOfIslington 11 DECEMBER

Dr Duncan Carmichael, an anti-ageing specialist?
Is that the self promoting flog a book medical specialisation?
Jeez

Reply 6 Recommend Report

S SARAH 11 DECEMBER

Why no picture of Dr Duncan himself? Just pretty models.
I wonder who the picture editor is today then...

Reply 6 Recommend Report

K K K Martin 11 DECEMBER

This all seems a bit complicated for s normal working person with a family and home to run. Was it this difficult in our parents day?

Reply 1 Recommend Report

M Makooya 11 DECEMBER

Advertorial? Me, I'm sticking with common sense and evidence based medicine.

Reply 8 Recommend Report

A Amy 11 DECEMBER

"Tired, stressed, no energy", sleep problems, achiness, etc... - find time for a fast 30 minute walk every day that has you breathless. A magic pill.

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