

Live to

100



"THE QUALITY OF A LIFE IS DEFINED NOT BY ITS LENGTH, BUT BY ITS DEPTH, ACTION AND ACHIEVEMENTS."

ANN PATCHETT,
American author

Photo: Getty Images/Tooga.

They say if you want to have a long life, choose the right parents. But genetics accounts for only 30 to 40 percent of longevity — the rest is up to you. To help you join the 100 club, we consulted top longevity experts to find out what changes five women could make to increase their odds. Turns out, there's plenty they (and you) can do to live longer *and* live better.

BY ANNE BOKMA



DEBBIE:
STRESSED OUT & OVERWORKED

Debbie, 35, has a high-level career at an international finance company. She's spent the last decade catching her zzzs on transatlantic overnights. She answers her BlackBerry 24/7 and hasn't taken a day off in two years, unless you count the time she checked herself into emergency with a nasty bout of food poisoning. She's lost touch with many of her friends from university—she's just too busy to maintain those social ties. She has a supportive, equally hard-working husband and has been married 14 years.

WHAT SHE'S DOING RIGHT

Being happily married ups Debbie's chances of living longer. Baby boomers in long-term stable relationships have a decreased risk of premature death during their mid-life years, according to a 2013 study by Duke Medical Center. The study found that never-marrieds were more than twice as likely to die early as their partnered peers.

BOOSTING HER ODDS

The prolonged cortisol spikes due to her frantic lifestyle may age Debbie before her time. Not only that, chronic stress is a killer. Debbie needs to put her career in perspective and find a way to create more balance. "Stress is at the root of almost all chronic degenerative diseases," says Dr. Andrew Wister, professor of gerontology at Simon

Fraser University, who suggests Debbie start making time for her old friends. "Developing a strong social network early in life carries you forward as you age. You have to have those connections." Friendship makes for great medicine: An Australian study of 1,477 people in their 70s found those with the most friends had a seven-year-longer lease on life.

Another way to battle stress is to carve out time for vacations, says Dr. B. Lynn Beattie, professor emerita of geriatric medicine at the University of British Columbia. Canadians collectively have 32 million unused vacation days, much to the detriment of their health. Women who go on holidays lower their risk of heart attack by 5 percent, according to the Framingham Heart Study. "Debbie really needs to recharge her batteries," says Beattie. "And she needs to take a holiday from her BlackBerry, too."



SHAWNA:
(NOT ALWAYS) HAPPY HOMEMAKER

Shawna, 42, is a stay-at-home mom of two grade-school kids and a caregiver to her mother, who has early dementia; Shawna visits her three times a week. She volunteers at her children's school twice a week and is also active in her local synagogue, where she attends weekly services. Between taking care of her kids, her mother and the household, Shawna has little time for herself. Lately she's been having a glass of wine at dinner and then another glass or two after the kids go

to bed as a reward for getting through her day. On the plus side, she and her husband enjoy an active sex life, which helps keep them connected.

WHAT SHE'S DOING RIGHT

Attending regular weekly religious services can add an extra two to three years to life expectancy, according to research published in the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*. Religion often leads to reductions in risky behaviour, such as smoking and drug and alcohol use. Religion can be a key factor in Shawna's happiness, helping establish more positive attitudes and emotions, which are associated with better health. Having a past history of regular satisfying sex is also a key predictor for increased longevity in women, say researchers at Duke University.

BOOSTING HER ODDS

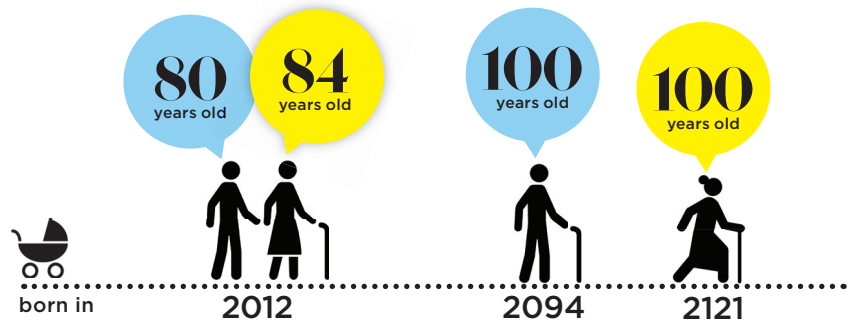
"Shawna is in danger of stretching herself too far," says Beattie. Dr. Walter Bortz, professor of medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine and author of *Dare to be 100: 99 Steps to a Long, Healthy Life*, agrees: "Everyone needs some respite and renewal, and Shawna seems over-committed. She needs to step back and take a look at how she can introduce some pleasurable pastimes in her life, perhaps gardening or golfing. I'm a firm believer in the idea that everyone has to try to be wonderful at something." Wister agrees that Shawna is in danger of suffering from a martyr complex. "If she doesn't take care of herself, it isn't good for everyone else in her life." Something else the experts agree on: Shawna needs to cut back on the booze, preferably to about one

MORE OF US MAKING IT TO



Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment holds the distinction of the longest life ever recorded. She lived to 122. At 85 she took up fencing, and she still rode a bicycle at 100. She died of natural causes, in her sleep, in 1997.

CAN EXPECT TO LIVE TO...



More of us are living longer than ever. While life expectancy was only about 50 years at the turn of the 20th century, today a Canadian female born in 2012 can expect to live to 84 (for men, it's 80). That's projected to increase to 100 years for males born in 2094 and to 100 years for females born in 2121.

glass a day (national low-risk guidelines in Canada recommend women have no more than two drinks a day or 10 a week). There are many health risks associated with drinking alcohol, including cancer, stroke and liver cirrhosis.



**SAMARA:
(MOSTLY)
CLEAN-LIVING
YOGA
ENTHUSIAST**

Samara is a single 28-year-old dental hygienist (her choice of profession makes her obsessive about flossing), who is proud that she's put one bad habit behind her: four years ago she quit smoking. Since then she's adopted other healthy practices, such as doing yoga three times a week, meditating for 15 minutes every weekday morning and becoming a vegetarian. However, more days than not, she skips breakfast. A night owl, she unwinds in front of the tube for several hours each evening and has trouble sleeping, sometimes clocking just four or five hours a night.

WHAT SHE'S DOING RIGHT

Going meatless means a longer life: Vegetarians have a 12 percent lower risk of premature death than carnivores, according to a recent *JAMA Internal Medicine* study of 70,000 Seventh-Day Adventists, who do not eat meat for religious reasons. Good oral health is also associated with a longer life — regular brushing and flossing can lower risks for heart disease, dementia and stroke.

BOOSTING HER ODDS

Quitting smoking is the best thing Samara could have done for her longevity since smoking is the leading preventable cause of cardiovascular death in women; more than 50 percent of heart attacks among mid-life women are attributable to tobacco. Women who give up smoking by age 30 will almost completely avoid the risks of dying early from tobacco-related diseases, according to a 2012 study of more than one million U.K. women, published in the *Lancet*.

But Samara needs more shut-eye. "People underestimate the importance of sleep," says Wister. "It's vital. You need seven or eight hours of good sleep a night for most nights of the week in order to function well." Studies show

people who sleep between 6.5 hours and 7.5 hours a night live the longest, while those who sleep less than 6.5 hours — or more than eight — don't live quite as long.

Samara also needs to turn off the telly and get off the couch. TV can literally drain your life away: Every hour of TV viewing after age 25 reduces lifespan by about 22 minutes, according to a recent study of 12,000 Australians, which found those who average six hours a day in front of the tube died nearly five years earlier than those who didn't watch any TV.

As for Samara's morning routine, skipping breakfast is never a good idea. Starting the day with a morning meal can extend life. A 2013 Harvard study of 27,000 mid-life men found those who skipped breakfast were 27 percent more likely to have a heart attack or die as the result of coronary heart disease. "A breakfast of yogurt and berries, or oatmeal and raisins, will help keep Samara's energy levels high in the morning, stabilize her blood sugar and help her maintain a healthy weight," says Sherry Torkos, pharmacist and author of *The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine*, who gives Samara kudos for her diligent morning meditation practice. "Meditation helps relieve stress and anxiety and improves sleep — all important factors for longevity."



**SUZIE:
SUNNY BUT
SEDENTARY**

Suzie is a 61-year-old teacher with type 2 diabetes who has gained 20 extra pounds since retiring a couple of years ago. A married empty-nester who has found life a little quiet since her kids left home, she doesn't get much exercise, except for playing golf once a week in summer and skiing weekly in the winter. She's blessed with a cheerful disposition, and there's nothing she enjoys more than doing the daily *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

WHAT SHE'S DOING RIGHT

Adopting an optimistic approach can add years to your life; patients with heart disease who had a positive attitude were 42 percent less likely to die over a five-year period than those with a negative attitude,



**CURIOUS TO KNOW
IF YOU'LL HIT 100?**

Check out this handy life expectancy calculator:

[canadianbusiness.com/
cbn-tools-life-expectancy-calculator](http://canadianbusiness.com/cbn-tools-life-expectancy-calculator)

according to a Danish study published in *Circulation*. Meanwhile, doing complex brain activities, such as crosswords, can slow cognitive decline and extend lifespan, according to researchers at UCLA.

BOOSTING HER ODDS

Our experts unanimously agree: The number one prescription for Suzie is more exercise.

Meeting (or, better yet, exceeding) the World Health Organization's recommendation of 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week could add about four years to your life, according to a study of 650,000 people over age 40 reported in *PLoS Medicine*. "If Suzie lost the extra weight, she could even reverse her type 2 diabetes," says Torkos. More activity would improve her overall health, keep her weight in check and regulate blood sugar, which also helps prevent long-term complications from diabetes such as eye, kidney, nerve and heart damage.

Suzie doesn't have to start running marathons or join an expensive gym. Wister suggests she combine exercise with social connections to ease her loneliness. She can find a neighbour to walk with, or join fitness programs at her local community centre. Getting a dog offers the double bonus of added companionship and regular walks, adds Bortz. Pet owners live longer and healthier lives — and dog-owning benefits include lower blood pressure, heart rates and cholesterol levels. He also urges Suzie to find ways to stay connected in the wider world, such as through volunteer work: "Your life depends on engagement — at the molecular level and at the social level." 🗨️



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