

From midlife to long life

How you treat your body and brain in your 40s and 50s can hugely influence how you age in the decades to come, says **Dana G. Smith**



STEER AWAY: A still from the 1960s Bengali film *Ashite Ashio Na* where Bhanu Bandyopadhyay plays a man on the brink of 80. He dreams that he and his wife, played by Ruma Guha Thakurta, have travelled back in time and become young again. The film might be classified as a comedy but it conveys the perennial anxieties of old age with all its aches, pains and indignities. Sourced by The Telegraph

The seeds for many age-related diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and dementia, are sown in middle age, so it's important to start thinking about prevention early.

"Midlife is the ideal time to make changes, not only to benefit you in the present but also in the future," said Margie Lachman, a psychology professor at Brandeis University, US, and the author of *Primetime: A New Vision for Midlife*. We spoke with experts about some small habits that can make a big difference.

Interval training

Cardio-respiratory fitness is one of the best predictors of longevity and being able to be active and mobile in the later years of your life", said Dr Guillem Gonzalez-Lomas, an associate professor of orthopaedic surgery at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine, US.

One way to improve your cardio-respiratory fitness is to incorporate interval training into your workouts a few times a week. For example, rather than logging 30 minutes on a treadmill

or a stationary bike at a steady pace, try alternating sprinting for 30 seconds and then resting for 30 seconds, 10 times through. It will be a shorter workout but ideally also a harder one because to get the biggest benefit, "You have to push yourself," Dr Gonzalez-Lomas said.

Friends time

Several experts emphasised the importance of social relationships for people's long-term health and well-being. People often "don't think of social interaction as a wellness intervention", said Dr Ezekiel Emanuel, a professor of medical ethics and health policy at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, US. But it may be "the most important wellness intervention", he said. Lachman suggested taking a "two birds, one stone" approach and joining up with someone to complete tasks on to-do lists. Those could include going for a walk or a workout together or even a trip to the grocery store.

Fermented foods

When you're thinking about the health of your body, don't for-

get about the trillions of organisms that live inside you — your microbiome — said Dr John Beard, a professor of productive ageing at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, US.

A healthy gut microbiome, in particular, is associated with healthy ageing. It is closely tied to the immune system and helps to control inflammation in the body, a major factor in many age-related diseases.

One of the best ways to care for your microbiome is to feed it fermented foods, which add more good microbes to the mix. You could start your day with a bowl of yogurt or incorporate kimchi, kombucha, kefir or sauerkraut into your diet.

Protein boost

People begin losing muscle mass in their 30s, a process that accelerates in their 60s. Eating enough protein, especially in combination with resistance training, can help to offset that loss. This doesn't mean you need to start protein maxing. The general guideline of 0.8 to 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight is sufficient,

said Dr Elena Volpi, director of the Institute for Longevity and Aging Studies at UT Health San Antonio, US. That translates to 54 to 81 grams of protein per day for a 68-kilo adult. She suggested including some protein in every meal.

Weight training

While aerobic fitness is essential for healthy longevity, research is mounting that muscle strength may be just as important. Having strong muscles is associated with greater longevity and independence in old age, while losing too much muscle increases the risk of frailty.

Along with its practical benefits, resistance training causes your muscles to release signalling molecules called myokines, some of which help to tamp down inflammation in the body.

If you've spent time around a dumbbell rack, don't be afraid to challenge yourself with heavier weights, Dr Gonzalez-Lomas said. But if you're just starting out, "anything that you do that's resistance training is going to make a difference".

The goal is to "get to a point where you're feeling like your

muscles are under stress" and starting to fatigue, Dr Gonzalez-Lomas said.

Parental health

While lifestyle affects risk for age-related diseases, genetics also play a role. Dr Volpi advised finding out which diseases run in the family and then talking to your doctor about how best to manage your risk over time. Ask which signs or symptoms you should watch out for.

Bed time

Getting too little sleep is associated with several health conditions, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease and dementia. It's also linked to a shorter life span. The advice to get seven to eight hours of sleep a night is easier said than done. So rather than focusing on a number, experts say you should perhaps try to stick to a consistent bedtime. Sleep regularity — going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time every day — according to a study, was an even stronger predictor of mortality than sleep duration.

NEW YORK TIMES
NEWS SERVICE