

# AUSTIN FIT

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## MAGAZINE



# THE *Longevity* ISSUE

How to live a  
longer, happier  
and healthier life.

**Pg. 32** Jerry Rothouse: Austin's Sweating Senior

**Pg. 38** Todd's Tips to Slow Down Aging

**Pg. 64** How to Be Fit and Fabulous at Any Age

# Todd's Tips to Slow Down Aging

Health and wellness author and podcast host Todd Whitthorne shares his helpful hints to slow down aging.

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I'm going to start with a warning. When I speak to live audiences and share what I'm about to share with you, it sometimes *really* resonates... and other times, it totally backfires. Fingers crossed.

Please grab a blank piece of paper and a pen or pencil (go ahead — I'll wait).

OK, here we go. In the middle of the paper, if you're a woman, write down the number 81, and if you're a man, write down the number 76.

Next, directly underneath that number, write down your age, in years, then draw a horizontal line under your entry.

Now, subtract the bottom number from the top number. Circle it.

That difference in the circle is the number of years, on average, you have left to live. Pretty thought-provoking, right?

(If your circled outcome is negative, then congratulations! You already beat the odds!)

Now, I have two questions:

- 1) Do you believe you will live longer or shorter than the number in the circle?
- 2) Why?

By the way, if you've already made it to 65, then, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention averages, you'll live to almost 86 if you're a woman and 83 if you're a man.

Please keep in mind that *you* are not average — no

one is. This exercise is really just intended to get you thinking and to help you focus on your current behaviors which will, without question, have an impact on your future.

How *long* you live is not nearly as important as how long you live *well*. Researchers often refer to the concept of QALYs, or Quality-Adjusted Life Years, a combination of length of life and quality of life. *Quality* is king! Personally, I'm not interested in living to 90 if my last 10 or 15 years are significantly compromised. My goal is not to *watch* my grandkids play — my goal is to *play with* my grandkids, and great grandkids, for as long as possible!

### Now what?

So, back to the number in the circle. How do you feel about it? Are you excited or surprised? Encouraged or disappointed? I'm guessing that since you are reading *Austin Fit*, you already have a pretty good understanding as to what contributes to your future and the quality of your life. Your health and longevity are really only about 20 percent genetic (mom and dad) and about 80 percent a function of your choices and behaviors. Are your current choices and behaviors likely to increase your odds of living long and well? If not, why?

The good news is that it's never too late. Yes, we live in an extremely challenging culture that makes it difficult to be healthy. Difficult — but certainly not impossible. The human body is beautifully designed and will do exactly what you ask it to do!

### What kind of car are you driving?

As I mentioned in the June issue, it's important to remember that you can't outsource your health. As Americans, we outsource a lot of things in our lives, but outsourcing health is simply not an option. You can't pay someone to eat for you, sleep for you or exercise for you. These, and all other health-related behaviors, are investments you must make in yourself.

I encourage you to think of your body as a Bugatti, the most expensive car in the world (if you haven't heard of it, just Google it — amazing)! Not only are *you* a human Bugatti, but you are also the only mechanic that can work on your masterpiece.

Simply put, if you want to increase that number in your circle, then that's entirely possible, but it's *totally* up to you. The sooner you get started, the



better. In fact, today would be tremendous! Think about something you can do today that will improve your odds of moving in a healthy direction. How about a walk, a nutritious meal, an extra hour of sleep? Consider stretching, yoga, Pilates or maybe a bike ride. Don't be an *intender* ... commit right now to start investing in yourself so that your future will be filled with a vast array of possibilities.

### Healthy aging — what does that mean?

Everything discussed to this point can all be placed in a bucket which could be described as “healthy aging.” While there are all sorts of things we can do to slow down the aging process, there are three parts that must serve as your foundation: exercise, nutrition and sleep. The Big Three is always a good place to start. Next, we must ask the question of “which is the most important?”

Yale's David Katz believes, “Diet is the single leading cause of premature death in America today.” Now, I'm certainly not opposed to preventing premature death, but my real goal is *optimizing life*. That may seem to be just a matter of semantics, but, to me, the difference is substantial. I don't want to just survive — I want to thrive! To do that, I need to embrace *all* of the Big Three with gusto.

That said, there is one thing that I consider to be the secret weapon.



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### Use it or lose it

Beginning from the day we are born, we become bigger, stronger and faster. Then, at some point, we become smaller, weaker and slower. *When* that happens and *how fast* it occurs is something we have the power to influence dramatically.

For most of us, we start losing muscle mass (aka sarcopenia) and strength in our 30s, certainly no later than our 40s. Studies indicate that some folks lose as much as 50 percent of muscle mass and 90 percent of strength between the ages 35 and 75. The primary reason for this is not age — but lack of use.

I imagine you’ve heard the expression “use it or lose it.” When it comes to staying strong and functional, this is an absolute fact. Please hear me loud and clear, if you are over 30 and are not doing some type of strength training on a regular basis (at least twice a week), then you are weaker than you were yesterday. Don’t balk, the science is irrefutable! This applies to both men and women. In fact, it’s *really* important for women because of their predisposition to osteoporosis.

As you age, maintaining muscular strength will not just improve your physical health, but it will also positively impact your mental health. Physical activity boosts recall, short-term memory and mood as well as lowering risk of depression, dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

Strength training (i.e. weight lifting, resistance

bands, yoga, Pilates, etc.) is, without question, one of the most important things you can do to ensure a future filled with vitality and variety. Maintaining strength, muscle mass and mobility will also improve your balance which will dramatically reduce your risk of falls and fracture. It all boils down to prioritizing your strength — then, your options expand exponentially.

### Shake my hand

Believe it or not, your grip strength is a terrific predictor of your future. In a 2015 study of over 150,000 men and women, for every 11-pound decrease in grip strength, as measured with a dynamometer, there was a 16-percent increase in all-cause mortality and a 17-percent higher risk of dying from heart disease. A similar study in 2019 found that individuals with below-average grip strength were 50 percent more likely to die than those in their peer group.

Now, I’m not suggesting that improving your grip strength is the key to living a long and healthy life, but we do know that grip strength goes hand-in-hand (pardon the pun) with *overall* strength. The only way you are going to stay strong and functional is to work at it!

The great news is it doesn’t take much time or money. What it takes is prioritization. If you know what you’re doing, then you can have a complete, strength-building workout in just 15 to 20 minutes. Be



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sure to hit all the major muscle groups at least twice a week and not just the “mirror muscles.” If you still feel that the time investment is an obstacle, then explore the “7-Minute Workout,” which is a form of HIIT training (high-intensity interval training).

You don’t need to join a gym, hire a trainer or buy a whole bunch of equipment. If you want to — great! However, none of that is necessary. Inexpensive dumbbells, resistance bands and body-weight exercises are more than enough for you to get a complete workout.

To be clear, I’m not recommending strength training *in place* of your aerobic conditioning (i.e. walking, running, swimming, cycling, etc.). What I am encouraging, though, is not to ignore the amazing benefits of staying strong throughout your life. With each passing year, it needs to become a larger priority.

### Strive to be an outlier

According to the CDC, less than 30 percent of men and 20 percent of women meet the Physical Activity Guidelines for *both* aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities. That’s tragic, especially considering the staggering rates of preventable conditions in our country such as obesity and heart disease.

Since March, we have all been dealing with an invisible enemy that is proving to be both rugged and patient. If you plan to effectively weather this storm and increase that number in your circle, I highly encourage you to embrace all of the tools you have at your disposal and recognize the importance of maintaining strength as you age. 



**Todd Whitthorne** is an author, speaker and corporate wellness executive based in Dallas. He serves as the Chief Inspiration Officer for Naturally Slim and is the author of *Fit Happens!... Simple Steps for a Healthier, More Productive Life!* Todd also hosts a twice-weekly podcast, *In Less Than a Minute*, which you can find on his website, [toddwhitthorne.com](http://toddwhitthorne.com), or on your favorite platform including Facebook and YouTube.