



by Dr. Sanjay Gupta

Chasing Life; Cheating Death

Winning **Health Strategies**
from Around the World



For many of us, living as long as we can really means living as well as we can. In fact, most people I've talked with in my world travels as a medical correspondent are not so interested in living as long as they can unless they continue to be of sound mind and sound body. One of the analogies that struck me during an interview is good and simple: We want to live our lives like an incandescent light bulb—burning brightly our entire lives and suddenly going out. We don't want all the flickering that we see with the fluorescent light bulbs at the end, which is emblematic of being bedridden, in hospitals, in nursing homes, etc.

Like many, I'm busy with my career, a growing family and the desire to be healthy. I happen to be fortunate enough to travel the world and learn from the very best scientists and people who are very successful at living long and well, or at "chasing life," as I call it in my book.

There are some common threads among those who live the best lives. I'll share with you a few that are not so obvious, but easily integrated into the most hectic lifestyles.

Focus on Upper Body

Running or walking on a treadmill is a move in the right direction for improved aerobic health. But, if you look at the physiology of exercise and at the people who have lived

the best lives, they tend to incorporate upper body training into their workout routines on a regular basis.

Upper body training is important because it tends to add muscle mass in an area where your body can readily absorb it. If you do this for fitness and not aesthetic reasons, the work you do on your upper body won't make you look bulky, but the increased muscle mass will improve your metabolic rate. That means you'll continue to burn calories even after your workouts. Being at a healthier weight is associated with living longer and better.

Upper body building or exercise also tends to ward off diseases, including osteoporosis, which really limits your ability to be active as you get older in life, and pneumonia, a big killer of people in their later decades of life.

As a runner, I incorporate upper body training in my routines. My mom, who is in her 60s, has added upper body training to her exercise regimen.

I recommend that people use some sort of weights, and more specifically free weights, for their upper body training. Gym machines tend to confine you to a certain predictable pattern of resistance, but your muscles like to be surprised a little every day. If you're someone who has never lifted weights, it might help to grab a few pounds and do lateral lifting (spreading your arms like a bird) 20 times, in between your aerobic activity. That's a start. Really, there are many upper body exercises, so incorporate those that

you and your doctor feel are best for you and do them diligently to reap the benefits.

Many Colors of Healthy Eating

Many people think “hassle” when they think of healthy eating—especially if they spend a lot of time on the road. There is, however, an easy exercise that helps keep even a traveler like me on track. I make a game out of eating seven different colored foods throughout the day. The exercise works for a couple of reasons: It keeps us from eating the same foods every day (like a sandwich) and helps us to spruce up our intake of foods with a variety of vegetables and fruits.

You're not limiting yourself with the colorful eating approach. You can have dark chocolate, from time to time, or red wine, from time to time. I don't keep a notepad; rather, I document my eating of colored foods mentally. By eating the different colored foods, I am more likely to get needed vitamins during the day.

I have two daughters (and a third child on the way). If you were to look at what they eat on any given night you'd see small plates with tons of different, little portions of food. This is not hard to do and is effective for helping achieve healthy eating patterns.

Find Your Sense of Purpose

People who live on the 160 islands of Okinawa are more likely to reach 100 years than people living anywhere on Earth. The Okinawans I interviewed there often attributed their long, productive lives to a term they love to use—*ikigai*—which basically means sense of purpose. Their point being, every day when they wake up, they know what their sense of purpose in life is.

Taken a step further, I think in most Western societies we're discarded from our professional lives around age 65.

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If we don't have strong family ties or the bonding of other relationships, we might not have that sense of purpose once our careers end. In the Japanese culture, when you get older, you're embraced, welcomed and respected even more so than when you're young. And I think it gives them a desire to live. That's why they say they live so long; they're needed—they have purpose in life.

Like everybody else, I have mornings when I don't want to get out of bed. But on those days I spend time thinking about my sense of purpose. Such reflection serves as a quick check of the things I'm thankful for, and it often propels me out of bed to start

my day.

Anybody can get caught up in the rat race of what they're doing and lose sight of the bigger picture. This can be very frustrating and disheartening because you forget why you're working so hard in the first place. A quiet morning reflection of your *ikigai* could help put your goals in perspective, solidify your family and other relationships—those things that have true meaning—and give you a clear sense of purpose for living.

Cheating Death

I've always been interested in why some people evade death when others don't. People have similar experiences with trauma or disease, yet some live and thrive. Something defines those people. For my latest book, I'm studying cases of people who doctors and others had pretty much written off, but who survived and emerged as relevant, contributing members of our society. From a physician's perspective, I'm interested in the common ingredients of their survival success.

More than anything else, I've learned that we are a society of touchdowns, knockouts and home runs. We always wait for that big thing, and until that big thing (a cure for cancer, your first IPO, etc.) happens, we don't define ourselves as successful.

If, on the other hand, we spent a little bit of time really thinking about things that are important to us and focusing on those things in our everyday lives—whether it's healthier eating, fitness, people who are most important to us—we would probably succeed a lot more than we could have possibly imagined. **S**

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Global Outreach
Dr. Sanjay Gupta, right, on a story for CNN

Photo by Jeff Hutchens/Reportage for CNN

Dr. Sanjay Gupta is chief medical correspondent for CNN, a practicing neurosurgeon and assistant professor of neurosurgery. His articles appear on CNN.com and he writes a column for TIME magazine, and is a contributor to the CBS Evening News with Katie Couric. His first book, *Chasing Life: New Discoveries in the Search for Immortality to Help You Age Less Today*, became a national best-seller. Soon, he'll release his second book, *Cheating Death*.