

Viva the Vital

June 26, 2008

Extending the Lifetime Warranty for Boomers

By Matt Thornhill

For many years now most Baby Boomers have been growing older without aging. We entered midlife at some point in our mid-30's, and most still consider themselves "middle aged" at age 50, 55, 60 and even 62. In fact, most of us feel like "old age" is something still pretty far off on the horizon, perhaps not arriving until age 80 or older. Those Boomers who have already celebrated their 60th birthday (we won't name names) are fairly confident they will live until age 90 or beyond.

That is, if we take care of ourselves.

A longer life seems to be in the cards for most Boomers, but the issue is what kind of life? We've seen the power of today's modern medical technology in keeping our parents and older relatives alive long after conventional medicine would have failed them. But we've likely also seen a less-than-ideal quality of life for them.

The quest, then, for Boomers at age 50, 60 and beyond is how to extend our good health and wellness as long as possible. Not how to live longer – as that seems to be a given – but how to live healthier, longer. Staying vital until our last breath.

This goal is going to be big business, and we're already seeing the early signs of it. From the doctors behind the "YOU: The Owner's Manual" and "YOU: Staying Young" book series, to the Kronos Longevity Research Institute's latest study on oxidative stress, caloric reduction and hormones that can impact the aging process, big business is putting big bucks into keeping us Boomers under warranty forever.

Recently there was a special advertising section in *The Wall Street Journal* on how Boomers can "turn back time" from the two doctors behind the "YOU" series and the RealAge.com Web site. They want to make money by helping Boomers stay younger, which means they are on a road to wealth. Nonetheless, many of their specific suggestions are simple to implement and the benefits seem plausible.

For example, according to them, if you eat breakfast every day, get six to eight hours of sleep nightly and eat fish for dinner several times a week, you'll live 7 years longer than if you don't. Of course, those who follow this advice but don't get the 7 extra years won't be around to complain to the good doctors that their math didn't add up. Not that we're skeptics.

One interesting tidbit they offer is that if you stick with a good habit for three years it can be like you've done it your whole life. That's good news for those among us who have gone through a midlife slump when it comes to eating right and exercising. We can right those wrongs and get back on the path to a longer, healthier life.

The list of steps to take to live a longer, healthier life are these: Take care of your heart (okay, not a new idea, but they do have some simple things to do – eat fish, floss, eat fruits and veggies, use aspirin and exercise), reduce your stress (aren't you glad you're not paying for this advice), get your blood sugar under control, beat your cancer odds (all sorts of ideas there), get sleep and strengthen your body.



The bottom line is that while your expiration date isn't completely under your control, you can decide how healthy the rest of your life could be. Heredity and luck certainly play roles in determining exactly when you'll kick the bucket, but much of the rest of it lies in your own hands.

A fascinating essay by former CNN *Crossfire* host Michael Kinsley in *The New Yorker* presents another perspective. Kinsley, 58, suffers from Parkinson's Disease and will not likely make it to his 85th birthday. His essay is about "The Last Boomer Game," or *he who dies last, wins*. Kinsley notes that life typically has three lotteries that you may or may not win. First is who gets to be the Big Man (or Woman) on Campus – the star athlete, head cheerleader, top student. Second is who succeeds at business making money and a name for themselves. Third is who lives the longest.

Kinsley writes as if his ticket has been punched. In truth, we're all short-termers once we pass age 50. Yes, we all want long lives. But to borrow from Dr. Martin Luther King, it's not the length of one's life, but the quality of that life that ultimately matters. So how are you doing on your quality control?

