

# What's your real HEALTH AGE?

Forget wrinkles, it's ageing on the inside that matters. Take our quiz to help you live longer

**Y**ou may look young, but it's your inner, biological age that determines how healthy you are in the future. The genes you inherit play a part, but a whopping 70-80% of your vitality is up to you, according to a study by Boston University, in America. Your daily habits can add or subtract years from

your life, whether you prefer greasy takeaways to healthy home-cooked meals, or you're inclined to lounge around on the sofa in front of the TV than get your trainers on for a run.

So find out how you fare in the health-age stakes by answering the questions below (come on, be honest now...) then circling each answer in the Your Actual Age panel, right.

## TRY THE QUIZ

### 1 How would you describe your average daily diet?

- ☐ Good, I eat my 5-a-day  
☐ Fair, I have the occasional takeaway  
☐ Poor, I love a bit of junk food

### 2 How often do you eat oily fish or eggs?

- ☐ Three or four times a week  
☐ Once or twice a week  
☐ Yuk, never touch them

### 3 What are your cholesterol levels like?

- ☐ Low  
☐ Average  
☐ High

### 4 How often do you drink alcohol?

- ☐ I never touch the stuff  
☐ I'm a social drinker, but I don't drink much  
☐ Most nights - I can't relax without a glass of wine (and I usually finish the bottle)

### 5 Do you smoke?

- ☐ No, never  
☐ I used to, but I've given up  
☐ Yes

### 6 How often do you exercise everyweek?

- ☐ I do 30 minutes, five times a week  
☐ I do a bit of exercise when I can be bothered, I'm quite active anyway  
☐ I haven't got the time or the energy

### 7 What is your parents' health like?

- ☐ Very good  
☐ Fair  
☐ Not good

### 8 How would you describe your stress levels?

- ☐ Low. I don't tend to get too stressed  
☐ Medium. My life's busy, but I manage  
☐ High. I often feel unable to cope

### 9 Are you in a long-term relationship?

- ☐ Yes, and we support each other  
☐ Yes, although we don't get on well  
☐ No, I'm single

### 10 Do you get much 'me time'/ time to relax?

- ☐ I make a point of making time on my own to wind down every day  
☐ Not much, but I grab a quick cuppa and a sit down when I can  
☐ Never!

## WORK OUT YOUR HEALTH AGE SCORE

Take your actual age and add or take away years according to your answers in the table below. For example, if you're 39 and scored ALL green answers you should pat yourself on the back as you have clawed back your teenage years with a health age of just 16! But a 39-year-old scoring ALL blues will have a health age of an incredible 87!

### YOUR ACTUAL AGE

1	-2	-1	+3
2	-2	-1	+3
3	0	+1	+8
4	-2	+4	+7
5	0	+3	+7
6	-2	+2	+3
7	-4	0	+5
8	-4	+2	+6
9	-3	+3	+1
10	-4	+1	+5

## WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

If you scored a younger health age, congratulations! Don't let your regime slip, though. Keep that score low by staying health-aware and deal with any health niggles as soon as they arise. If you scored an older health age, see the Live Longer Rules to make changes and bring down your health age.



For more ideas to boost your wellbeing see **Fit & Well**, on sale now, £1.99.

## 7 LIVE LONGER RULES

**1 Ease stress** Excessive stress can shorten your life. University of California researchers say it can add 10 or more years to the biological age of a woman's cells, and could be linked to the early onset of age-related diseases. Avoid situations that you know will stress you and make some 'me time' involving deep-breathing techniques and relaxation. Try to find at least 10 minutes every day where you're completely alone and focused on relaxation.

**2 Get fit** Up your activity levels to reduce your health age. Try to do something that will get your heart pounding every day, such as going car-free for a week and seeing how much better you feel physically. Cycling and swimming are great for all-round exercise. Even moderate exercise can lower your biological age by up to three years. You'll lose weight, too (being obese increases conditions such as diabetes, possibly shaving up to 12 years off your life, according to the journal *Obesity*).

**3 Eat well** Ideally, aim for eight portions of fruit and veg a day, but if you're managing five, you're doing well and could be adding two to three years to your life. Eat a diet low in fat to guard against cholesterol and

improve your heart health. Opt for oily fish (such as salmon and mackerel) up to three times a week to boost your brain and protect your heart. And eating high-quality protein sources, such as eggs, are great for body growth and repair.

**4 Cut out smoking** It's never too late to quit. Giving up now can add five years to your life expectancy. More than 100,000 people die in the UK each year because of smoking - it's the largest cause of preventable death. But it's not only the ciggies...

**5 Limit drinking** Alcohol is responsible for more than 40,000 deaths in the UK each year, plus it causes accelerated ageing throughout your body, particularly the brain. Limit your drinking to no more than two to three units a day (175ml glass of 13% wine), ideally less, to lower your health age significantly.

**6 Find a little love - and sex!** A little bit of love can go a long way to a longer life. People in loving, long-term relationships tend to live around six years longer than their single friends. Of course, sex keeps you young, too, and lengthens your life. It not only raises your hormone levels (so keeping you young), but can boost your metabolism, heart health, immunity and brain function, too. What a great excuse for a bit of fun between the sheets!

## 7 Check your genes

Your parents' health is a factor in assessing your life expectancy because conditions such as heart disease and some cancers run in the family. But tweaks to your lifestyle - including the tips above - mean you can help protect yourself. ☺



Whatever your age, Joan, 82, Sandra, 50, and Lorraine, 55, are healthy role models