

## THE BIG IDEAS

**Respect for the Aged**  
It's super important.

**Two Doctors**  
Your right leg and your left leg.

**The Magic Pill**  
It's called exercise.

**Unhealthy Ads**  
In your doctor's office.

**Diets of Long-Lived Peeps**  
Are very similar.

**Rock Hard Abs**  
& Loving your life.

**Accomplices?**  
Or everyday revolutionaries?

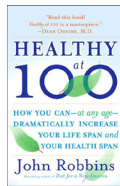
**We Can Change Things!**  
And now's a good time to do it.

**How Important Is Love?**  
Very.

**What're Your Plans**  
For this precious life of yours?

**Language of Gratitude**  
Key to happiness.

**The Fountain of Youth**  
Is in your soul.



# Healthy at 100

The Scientifically Proven Secrets of the World's Healthiest and Longest-Lived Peoples ... How You Can—At Any Age—Dramatically Increase Your Life Span and Your *Health Span*

BY JOHN ROBBINS · RANDOM HOUSE © 2006 · 357 PAGES

“It has been said that we can destroy ourselves with negativity just as effectively as with bombs. If we see only the worst in ourselves, it erodes our capacity to act. If, on the other hand, we are drawn forward by a positive vision of how we might live, we can shrug off the cynicism that has become fashionable today and build truly healthy lives.

It is extraordinarily important for us today to replace the prevailing image and reality of aging with a new vision—one in which we grasp the possibility of living all our days with exuberance and passion. There are few things of greater consequence today than for us to bring our lives into alignment with our true potential for health and our dreams for a better tomorrow.”

~ John Robbins from *Healthy at 100*

As I reflect on this great book by [John Robbins](#) (author of *Diet for a New America*), two things come to mind: 1) I'm incredibly inspired by Robbins' scientifically grounded vision of how we can be healthy at 100 and, 2) I'm equally inspired by how \*good\* of a person Robbins seems to be. His love and wisdom is present on every page and the book is PACKED with Big Ideas.

In *Healthy at 100*, Robbins presents a compelling case on how we can be, you guessed it, healthy and vitally alive at 100 as he takes a look at the scientific research done on the healthiest and longest-lived peoples on the planet—from Abkhasia to the Hunza and Okinawa to Vilcabamba (where I happen to be as I write this :). He supplements that goodness with all kinds of Big Ideas touching on everything from nutrition and exercise to purpose and love.

How about we take a look at some of my favorite Ideas now? :)

## RESPECT FOR THE AGED

“The Abkhasian respect for the aged is clear from their vocabulary. They do not even have a phrase meaning “old people.” Instead, those over 100 are called “long-living people.” And all Abkhasian villages celebrate a holiday in their honor called “the Day of the Long-Living People.” On this day each year, the elders dress in elaborate costumes and parade before the rest of the villagers, who gather to pay them homage.”

How awesome is *that*? The Abkhadians don't even have a phrase for “old people.” Love it.

(Kinda reminds me of how the Tibetans don't even have a word for “guilty.” The closest they have, according to [Geshe Michael Roach](#) in *The Diamond Cutter* (see Notes), is “intelligent regret that decides to do things differently.” :)

Back to the idea of honoring “Long-Living People”!

Researchers have discovered a common theme of enormous respect for the aged among the longest lived cultures. Unfortunately, in our youth obsessed world, old age is associated with frailty and senility rather than wisdom and insight.

*"Exuberance is beauty."*

~ William Blake

For example, how wacky is this?? "In countless ways, the dominant Western culture teaches us to value younger people and devalue older ones. How often do we notice when movie roles that should be played by mature actresses are played instead by hot young babes? In the 2005 film *Alexander*, for example, the mother of Alexander the Great (played by Colin Farrell) is portrayed by Angelina Jolie, who in fact is all of eleven months older than Colin Farrell."

If we want to be healthy at 100, it's clear we've gotta reconstruct our view of what it means to be "long-lived," eh?!

## TWO DOCTORS: THE LEFT LEG & THE RIGHT LEG

*"But as Edward Stanley put it way back in 1873, 'Those who think they have no time for bodily exercise will sooner or later have to find time for illness.'"*

~ John Robbins

"In the modern world, when people are feeling down they are often told to "take it easy," to simply lie in bed and relax. In both Vilcabamba and Abkhazia, however, people experiencing "the blues" typically respond by becoming active and involved with others. Rather than withdrawing and becoming sedentary, they will walk great distances for the joy of visiting one another. So great is the recognition of the healing power of walking to visit a friend that there is a saying in Vilcabamba that each of us has two "doctors"—the left and the right leg."

Hah. Smiling as I think about the fact that we all have two doctors—our right and left legs. :)

We've talked about the power of exercise a number of times throughout these Notes (and in Optimal Living 101) and I'm going to keep on coming back to it. Because we KNOW, scientifically and beyond a shadow of a doubt, just how important exercise is to our well-being.

In fact, [Tal Ben-Shahar](#) actually says NOT exercising is like taking a depressant. Which makes me wonder how it's ethically possible for a licensed therapist to prescribe a medication without prescribing exercise first. But we'll save that for another discussion. :)

For now, KNOW (please please please!) that if you or someone you love is feeling the funk, exercise is one of the most important things you/they can do.

[Sonja Lyubomirsky](#), the renowned Positive Psychology researcher tells us this in her \*awesome\* book [The How of Happiness](#) (see Notes): "An impressive study of physical activity was published in the Archives of Internal Medicine in 1999. The researchers recruited men and women fifty years old and over, all of them suffering from clinical depression, and divided them randomly into three groups. The first group was assigned to four months of aerobic exercise, the second group to four months of antidepressant medication (Zoloft), and the third group to both. The assigned exercise involved three supervised forty-five-minute sessions per week of cycling or walking/jogging at moderate to high intensity. Remarkably, by the end of the four-month intervention period, all three groups had experienced their depressions lift and reported fewer dysfunctional attitudes and increased happiness and self-esteem. Aerobic exercise was just as effective at treating depression as was Zoloft, or as a combination of exercise and Zoloft. Yet exercise is a lot less expensive, usually with no side effects apart from soreness. Perhaps even more remarkably, six months later, participants who had "remitted" (recovered) from their depressions were less likely to relapse if they had been in the exercise group (six months ago!) than if they had been in the medication group."

*"If you can't fly, then run.  
If you can't run then walk.  
If you can't walk, then  
crawl. But whatever you do,  
keep moving."*

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

She follows that up with this: "No one in our society needs to be told that exercise is good for us. Whether you are overweight or have a chronic illness or are a slim couch potato, you've probably heard or read this dictum countless times throughout your life. But has anyone told you—indeed, guaranteed you—that regular physical activity will make you happier? I swear by it."

Here's to getting our two doctors to work!! :)

And... How about a little more mojo on this?

*"Dr. Paffenbarger and his associates tracked their subjects' health and activity levels for four decades and found that participants' death rates fell in direct proportion to the number of calories they burned each week. Almost invariably, the more active they were, the longer they lived."*

~ John Robbins

## THE MAGIC PILL

"What if there was a pill that would keep you fit and lean as you aged, while protecting your heart and bones? What if it was as good for your brain as for your body, if it made you stronger, more confident, less susceptible to depression? What if it improved your sleep, mood, and memory and reduced your risk of cancer, all while adding life to your years and years to your life?"

A great number of studies have found that exercise can provide all these benefits and more, even for people who begin late in life. We are learning that much of the physical decline that older people suffer stems not from age but from simple disuse."

To answer Robbins' rhetorical question, if there was a pill that would do everything he just described, we'd ALL take it. And it would be a trillion dollar product.

Tragically, because exercise isn't quite as easy as popping a pill and marketing it isn't anywhere near as lucrative, too few of us exercise consistently enough.

But not us lovers of wisdom. :)

Seriously though.

I'm focusing on exercise because it's THAT important. If you or someone you love is feeling all craptastic, EXERCISE. EXERCISE. EXERCISE.

You simply couldn't pay me enough to NOT exercise. No way. I know what I'm like when I don't move consistently and trust me, it's not pretty. :)

## UNHEALTHY ADS

*"It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society."*

~ Jiddu Krishnamurti

"If you go to a doctor in the United States for health tips, you may find in the waiting room a glossy 243-page magazine titled *Family Doctor: Your Essential Guide to Health and Wellbeing*. Published by the American Academy of Family Physicians and sent free to the offices of all fifty thousand family doctors in the United States in 2004, it's full of glossy full-page color ads for McDonald's, Dr Pepper, chocolate pudding, and Oreo cookies.

Meanwhile, kids in U.S. schools are learning arithmetic by counting M&M's, using lesson plans supplied by candy companies. When they walk through the hallways of their high schools, they may see a series of brightly colored mini-billboards, cheerfully telling them that "M&M's are better than straight A's" and instructing them to "satisfy your hunger for higher education with a Snickers."

Gah. It's almost hard to believe that ads for Dr Pepper, McDonald's and Oreos could be within 10 feet of a book in your family doctor's friendly health guide, eh?

Who would think THAT was cool?

We'll save a longer rant for another important, longer chat on the Politics of Food (Note on that coming soon!). For now, back to the regularly scheduled programming. :)

## THE DIETS OF LONG-LIVED PEEPS ARE VERY SIMILAR

"It is actually quite interesting how similar the traditional Hunzan diet is to the traditional diets of the Vilcabambans and Abkhasians. Though they live in very different parts of the world, the traditional diets of all three of these extraordinarily healthy societies are very low in calories by modern standards. In all three cases, protein and fat are almost entirely of vegetable origin. And all three depend entirely on natural foods rather than processed and manufactured ones."

Robbins has an awesome little chart in the book that brings the point home. Get this: In these longest-lived cultures, over 90% of the diet comes from plant foods (99% for both Vilcabamba

*"Exercise is king. Nutrition is queen. Put them together and you have a kingdom."*

~ Jack LaLanne

*"One of the most remarkable findings of modern scientific research is that no intervention, including the elimination of smoking, has been found to be as important in overall life extension as cutting back on calories while maximizing dietary nutrients."*

~ John Robbins

and Hunza) while NONE of them have any sugar or processed food consumption. In addition to boasting the healthiest/longest lived cultures, their incidence of obesity is ZERO.

[Joshua Rosenthal](#) puts it well in his great book [Integrative Nutrition](#) (see Notes) where he says: *"In spite of the enormous amount of confusing and contradictory information that regularly floods the world of nutrition, the basics are simple. Most people would be much better off consuming less meat, milk, sugar, chemicalized, artificial junk food, alcohol, caffeine and tobacco and increasing their consumption of water, whole grains and vegetables, especially dark leafy greens."*

In short: If we want to live longer healthier lives, nutrition-wise we've gotta get rid of the refined/processed foods and sugars, drastically reduce or eliminate the animal products and eat a lot more green veggies. And, obviously, quit smoking and drinking so much caffeine and reduce the alcohol consumption if you're going gonzo on that stuff.

It's not *that* complicated, eh? As always, it's just a matter of actually DOING what we know to be best for us. I believe they call that "Simple but not easy." Here's to rockin' it! :)

## ROCK HARD ABS AND LOVING OUR LIVES

**"There is little point in having low cholesterol and rock hard abs if you don't love your life."**

Hah. Well, that's one way to put it, eh? :)

[Joshua Rosenthal](#) echoes this wisdom as well in [Integrative Nutrition](#) (again, check out the Notes). He talks about the fact that when he used to work at a natural foods store he'd often see all these people shopping for uber-healthy food while looking super melancholy and unhealthy. Then he'd go across the street to the movie theatre and see people munching on popcorn but laughing and looking super alive.

Influenced by this and all kinds of other data, he created a cool new food pyramid where he emphasizes what he calls "Primary Foods" and says this: *"Primary food is more than what is on your plate. Healthy relationships, regular physical activity, a fulfilling career and a spiritual practice can fill your soul and satisfy your hunger for life. When primary food is balanced and satiating, your life feeds you, making what you eat secondary."*

So, here's to filling up on our primary foods and loving our lives as we get the cholesterol and abs rockin' as well. :)

## ACCOMPLICES OR EVERYDAY REVOLUTIONARIES

**"Whether we acknowledge it or not, we all have a choice to be either accomplices in the status quo or everyday revolutionaries. We have a choice whether to succumb to the cultural trance, eat fast food, and race by each other in the night, or to build lives of caring, substance and healing. So much depends on that choice."**

Love. That.

[Michael Beckwith](#) puts it this way in his great book [Spiritual Liberation](#) (see Notes): *"One of the ways we hijack our capacity to experience a state of beholding is that we become swept up in what I call the 'tyranny of trends.' The tyranny of trends allows for the lowest common denominator to set the standard of success, and of course, 'coolness.' Very often, trends convince individuals what their life's purpose should be. The tyranny of trends is blasted out at us from television, radio, newspapers, tabloids, computers, and even our dentist's waiting room, attempting to convince us that we must smell a certain way, wear a certain label, weigh a specific weight, have whiter teeth, drive a certain car, make a certain income, and so on, before we can consider that we've made it."*

*"It is a poignant sign of our times when the largest-selling board game in the world today is Monopoly, in which the goal is to bankrupt your opponents and amass all wealth unto yourself. More than two hundred million Monopoly sets have been sold, and the game is currently produced in twenty-six languages."*

~ John Robbins

Here's to breaking out of the tyranny of the trends and becoming everyday revolutionaries living our highest truths!

## WE CAN CHANGE THINGS!

*"If North Americans lived more like the elder Okinawans, we would have to close eighty percent of the coronary units and one-third of the cancer wards in the US, and a lot of nursing homes would also be out of business."*

~ Okinawa Centerian Study

"I have been deeply moved by the reality that if North Americans were to live and eat the way the elderly Okinawans do, there is every likelihood that we, too, would greatly reduce premature aging, enhance the quality of our lives, and reduce our risk of heart disease by 80 percent."

Too often we think that we somehow lost the genetic lottery and/or just get bad luck as a culture to see so many people we love dying of heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

But that's simply not true.

If we took responsibility for our lives and made better choices about the foods we eat, the way we move our bodies and the way we approach our relationships and challenges, we could eliminate a HUGE percentage of the diseases that plague our society.

## WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

*"We cannot live for ourselves alone. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow man."*

~ Herman Melville

"There are also medical implications to whether we think of others or only of ourselves as Larry Scherwitz found out when he conducted a most unusual study... Dr. Scherwitz taped the conversations of nearly six hundred men. About a third of these men were suffering from heart disease; the rest were healthy. Listening to the tapes, he counted how often each man used the words *I, me* and *mine*. Comparing his results with the frequency of heart disease, he found that the men who used the first-person pronouns the most often had the highest risk of heart trouble. What's more, by following his subjects for several years thereafter, he found that the more a man habitually talked about himself, the greater the chance he would actually have a heart attack."

Wow. That's from the chapter entitled "What's Love Got to Do With It?" Needless to say, the answer to that question is: A LOT.

So... How can you be more loving today? (And tomorrow? And... :)

## WHAT'RE YOUR PRECIOUS LIFE PLANS?

*"... the word 'retirement' does not exist in the traditional Okinawan dialect."*

~ John Robbins

"How would our lives be different if we could realize that tomorrow isn't promised to anyone? How would our lives change if we understood that time is only lent to us, that our days are but a trust handed into our temporary keeping?"

If we were to grasp fully that someday we too shall die, would it help us to answer the poet Mary Oliver's question, "What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

BEAUTIFUL!

So many great teachers advise us to honor the fact that we will, one day, die. Yep. Hate to be the one to break the news to you, but it's true. We're all gonna die. :)

Robbins also points out that the longest lived people are FULLY ENGAGED with life. So, with that awareness and respect for the brevity of the blessing that is our life, I echo Mary Oliver and ask you: What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?!

## BEING ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH HAPPINESS

"Remember that one who forgets the language of gratitude can never be on speaking terms with happiness."

Robbins concludes the book with a mini-chapter called "Steps You Can Take" where he quickly highlights a practical list of inspiring stuff to remember on our quest for healthy, happy lives.



Those poetic words above are the very last words of the book. Which is quite fitting because we scientifically know that gratitude is the #1 happiness practice out there.

As [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#) tells us: “People who are consistently grateful have been found to be relatively happier, more energetic, and more hopeful and to report experiencing more frequent positive emotions. They also tend to be more helpful and empathic, more spiritual and religious, more forgiving, and less materialistic than others who are less predisposed to gratefulness. Furthermore, the more a person is inclined to gratitude, the less likely he or she is to be depressed, anxious, lonely, envious, or neurotic.”

So, let’s flex our gratitude muscles with a little more reflection... For what are *you* grateful?

## THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH IS IN YOUR SOUL

“Finding the fountain of youth is not about living forever. It’s about allowing your life to be guided by your soul. It’s about finding the fountain of joy and the fountain of life. It’s about living so fully that you know you have really lived. It’s about loving so fully that you know you have really loved.

May you find the fountain of youth, not as an exotic place somewhere hidden and remote, but within yourself, as the very way you walk through life. May your sorrow as well as your joy be a doorway to your greater heart. May you find your way through the fathomless mystery of your life to the source of all that is good and true.”

Amen.

Here’s to living and loving so fully that we know we have truly lived,

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

If you liked this Note,  
you’ll probably like...

**Diet for a New America**

[The RAVE Diet](#)

[Dare to Be 100](#)

[Integrative Nutrition](#)

**Thrive**

[The How of Happiness](#)

## About the Author of “Healthy at 100”

JOHN ROBBINS



Widely considered one of the world’s leading experts on the dietary link between the environment and health, John Robbins is the author of the million-copy best-seller *Diet for a New America*. His work has been the subject of cover stories and and feature articles in numerous publications. Robbins has been a featured and keynote speaker at hundreds of major conferences including those sponsored by the Sierra Club and UNICEF, and is the recipient of many awards including the Rachel Carson Award and the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award. (Adapted from the book. Learn more at [www.healthyat100.org](http://www.healthyat100.org))

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).