

PARADE

Snowboarder Shaun White, a gold medal-winner at last year's X Games in Aspen, Colo., is poised to soar for more gold at the Olympics.

Four years ago in Salt Lake City, our Winter Olympic team won an unprecedented 34 medals.

The question this year in Turin:
**How High Will
The U.S. Fly?**
By Bud Greenspan

Plus... Why You May Live Longer • How To Avoid Hearing Loss • Actress Zooey Deschanel



Why You May Live Better—And Longer

By Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld



Four years ago, Mary Sharkey of Houston was diagnosed with early cancer of the pancreas. She underwent chemotherapy and an intricate surgical procedure that saved her life. Today, at 54, she has a clean bill of health.

This article begins the second segment of our Live Longer, Better, Wiser™ series, a guide to living a healthier, fuller life using new knowledge and resources. Here, you will read how medical advances are controlling a host of diseases, making life potentially more comfortable and enjoyable—and longer. We also look at premature hearing loss among young people, with advice on how to protect yourself. A PARADE/Research!America poll reveals how Americans think and feel about aging, and the American Heart Association provides resources to keep your heart healthy.

his acts being seven ages..." and which concludes:

"last scene of all...is second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

C'mon, Will! More of us have our teeth, our vision and our taste than our parents and grandparents did. We still have some way to go, but today's baby boomers have reason to be optimistic about how long and how well they will live in their later years.

Life expectancy continues to increase: A child born in 2003 can expect to live 77.6 years—up from 77.3 the year before and 75.4 years in 1990. Deaths from heart disease, cancer and stroke—the nation's three leading killers—have been dropping steadily. Research shows that more older folks are living independently and enjoying it more.

Much of this progress is due to the realization that we must start early in life to minimize the dreaded manifestations of aging—everything from wrinkled skin to a heart attack, stroke, cancer or bone-breaking osteoporosis. You mustn't wait for your first Social Security check to arrive before you start eating the right diet, exercising and controlling your weight.

Still, there does come a time—later these days rather than sooner—when the diseases of aging begin to appear. Here are the highlights of some of the progress that's been made to control them:

Advances in the control of diseases are increasing the quality and length of life.

Alzheimer's disease. In addition to the genes previously identified as possibly responsible for Alzheimer's, several new ones have been found. Population studies are under way that will identify other risk factors we may be able to control.

THE GREATEST COMPLIMENT you can give anyone over 40 is to tell him or her, "You don't look your age." Kids can't wait to grow up, but no adult I know wants to grow old. It's not so much the fear of death as the anticipation of physical and mental limitations. We dread being unable to care for ourselves and becoming a burden to others.

So aging research is a high priority. But while some researchers are investigating how we can live virtually forever, what you and I most care about is preventing, delaying or successfully treating the diseases that shorten life and/or impair its quality.

And that research has been successful. More and more 80-year-olds today look, feel and act like 60-year-olds did a generation ago. Were he alive today, Shakespeare would have to rethink the ending of the famous "ages of man" piece in *As You Like It*, which begins: "All the world's a stage... one man in his time plays many parts,

We can diagnose the disease earlier than ever thanks to newer and more powerful imaging techniques: PET scans that identify metabolic changes in the brain and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to reveal structural changes.

There are new medications—such as Aricept and Cognex—that improve symptoms of Alzheimer's, especially in its early stages. All may slow down the progress of the disease. These include various anti-inflammatory agents, such as aspirin and the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; statin medications, used to lower cholesterol levels; the omega-3 fatty acids in fish; and supplements of folic acid and vitamins B₆ and B₁₂ to reduce high levels of the amino acid homocysteine in the blood.

Antibodies that clear the amyloid plaques in the brain, thought to be responsible for Alzheimer's, are being tested and may soon be available.

Arthritis. Newer drugs more effectively control rheumatoid arthritis. And we have documented the importance of exercise to reduce the disability of osteoarthritis, especially of the knees, in people over 50.

Diabetes. This disease can lead to serious complications of the vascular system, especially in older persons. We now can identify a prediabetic state and so prevent the development of full-blown diabetes through weight reduction, a low-fat diet, moderate exercise and drugs such as metformin.

Heart attack. Because we can identify and control the risk factors for heart attack, there has been a significant drop in deaths from this disorder. But

even after it has developed, we are able to treat heart disease itself more effectively. We can remove obstructing clots by angioplasty or bypass them surgically before they damage heart muscle. Implanted cardiac defibrillators and pacemakers have reduced the incidence of sudden death, and a host of new drugs can strengthen a weakened heart muscle—all dramatically improving the quality and duration of life for millions. Research in gene therapy and stem cells holds promise for improving the function of severely damaged hearts.

Research shows that older people are living independently and enjoying it more.

Stroke. We can prevent stroke with nonsurgical techniques that remove or dissolve clots in the carotid arteries in the neck. New and better-tolerated medications control high blood pressure—the leading cause of stroke. Patients paralyzed by a stroke are benefiting from improved physiotherapy techniques and technological devices that restore mobility and function.

Sexual activity. Despite all the jokes about Viagra, Levitra and Cialis, these medications have made it possible for men of all ages who have the desire—and most do—to enjoy a satisfying sexual relationship. The sexual health of senior males also has been improved by a better understanding of the role of the male hormone testosterone.

Osteoporosis. There are new, effective and better-tolerated drugs to prevent calcium loss, which thins the bones and leads to fractures after menopause. Girls who eat lots of calcium and exercise regularly in their teens—and continue throughout those critical premenopausal years—can prevent osteoporosis.

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PHOTO OF MARY SHARKEY BY TERRY WINE FOR PARADE

Dental health. We now appreciate the importance of oral health, not only to obtain good nutrition but also because gum disease is an important cause and precursor of heart trouble.

Despite the advances, half of all Americans aged 55 to 64 have high blood pressure; two in five are obese.

Cancer. More malignancies can now be detected and successfully treated than ever before. A vaccine recently has been developed to protect against the human papilloma virus, the cause of most cervical cancers. More Americans are aware of the risk factors for a host of cancers and how to control them.

Thanks to a better understanding of the immune system, there are therapeutic antibodies to attack cancer cells; surgical and laser techniques to destroy, shrink or remove cancer cells and leave normal ones intact; and new forms of chemotherapy that are better tolerated and more effective.

The health challenge we all face. Despite all this good news, there are some clouds on the horizon. According to the latest reports from the National Center for Health Statistics, half of all Americans aged 55 to 64 have high blood pressure; two of every five among them are obese. They are in worse shape than people born 10 years earlier were when *they* reached 55.

Still, thanks to the fruits of ongoing research and the education of children, teens and parents about the importance of a healthy lifestyle (including proper diet, exercise and avoiding tobacco), many Americans are aging more healthily and productively than ever before. Let us hope this happy trend continues. ■

Taking Our Pulse

The PARADE/Research!America
Health Poll

What Americans Think About Aging And Health

PARADE and Research!America, the nonprofit organization that advocates for medical research, recently polled a cross-section of 1000 Americans on their attitudes about aging. Previously, we published the survey's results regarding attitudes about longevity. In this issue, we share the concerns of Americans regarding aging and its effects on health.

Our main concern.

More than a third of Americans (37%) said poor, declining health was their main concern about growing old. That was followed by financial concerns (23%).

Our greatest fear.

More than twice as many Americans (62%) fear losing their mental capacity as they age as those who fear a diminished physical capacity (29%).

How much of the aging process do we control?

The majority of Americans—84%—believe there are things they can do to control the aging process.

How many of us are taking action?

A majority of Americans—83%—say they are taking action now to stay healthy as they age.

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What we are doing to stay healthy.

More than half of Americans (56%) say the primary thing they are doing to stay healthy as they grow older is to engage in physical activity. Second on the list was watching what they eat: 26% of Americans put that first. (However, only 3% said the first thing they were doing was watching their weight.)

The medical breakthroughs we predict.

More than half of Americans think that in the next 20 years scientists will find a cure for diabetes (65%), for Parkinson's disease (59%), for Alzheimer's disease (54%) and for heart disease (52%). Just under half think scientists will find a cure for cancer (48%) and for AIDS (47%) within the next two decades.

Our expectations of research.

Nearly all Americans—96%—think it is important to invest in research to prevent, treat and cure disabilities that primarily affect older Americans.

The No. 1 health problem we want to solve.

When asked to choose only one health problem that Americans want to solve, cancer far surpassed all others, with 42% of the responses. It was followed by heart disease (9%), Alzheimer's and other degenerative diseases (9%), AIDS (9%) and diabetes (6%).



To see the complete results of this poll and to learn more about medical and health research, visit research.america.org on the Web.