

By **Dayna Dye, Certified Medical Assistant**

Scientifically reviewed by: **Michael A. Smith, MD**

You won't find any junk food in the legendary fountain of youth. New research has linked a diet low in processed foods to a slower aging process. A study of nearly 2,000 individuals published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that the **more wholesome their diet was, the more slowly they aged**.

"Our findings demonstrate that better diet quality was associated with decelerated biological aging, providing a promising avenue to explore the beneficial effects of diet on prolonged lifespans," the authors of the article wrote, adding that "adopting a healthy diet is crucial for maintaining healthy aging."

DASH diet linked to slower aging process



Published in June 2021, the study measured how closely participants adhered to the **DASH diet**, while also looking at how quickly their biological ages advanced over a 10-year time period. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, and it is a largely **plant-based diet** that emphasizes whole foods and discourages the intake of **processed foods**.

While the goal of DASH is to fend off high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases, evidence suggests it also helps protect against kidney and liver diseases, cancer, osteoarthritis, gout, metabolic syndrome, obesity, and other disorders—so these new findings may not be surprising to advocates of DASH.

Measuring the rate of aging



How did researchers determine that study participants who adhered to a DASH diet aged at a slower rate? They looked at how methylation affected the subjects' DNA.

Our genes are composed of DNA, which is a molecule that provides the instructions needed for our development, survival and reproduction. DNA methylation occurs when a methyl group consisting of carbon and hydrogen is added to certain parts of DNA, which can affect gene function and expression. During aging, some DNA regions become overmethylated while others are undermethylated.

"Diet-associated differential DNA methylation can be linked to metabolic and inflammatory pathways, which indicates the importance of diet-induced epigenetic changes on health outcomes," the study authors remarked.

Epigenetics is the science of the processes that help determine when genes are turned on or off, without altering the genes themselves.

This study isn't the first time DNA methylation status has been used to predict life span. Other studies have linked it to disease progression and death. Ultimately, this measurement can help you understand your biologic age, which, depending upon how healthy your lifestyle is, might be younger or older than your chronologic age.

Why your chronologic age is less important than your biologic age

Chronologic age refers to the number of years someone has lived, whereas biologic age provides a more accurate estimation of a person's age based on the measurement of various markers. As an example, someone who smokes, rarely exercises, is overweight and has bad eating habits may be determined to be biologically "older" than their chronologic age and runs the risk of failing to attain the average **human life span**.

This new study suggests that diet is an especially important factor when it comes to staying biologically youthful, no matter the date of birth on your driver's license.

What foods should you avoid to stay biologically young?

Adhering to the DASH diet naturally limits your consumption of processed foods, which are, as the name implies, foods that have been processed in ways that change them from their natural state.

While foods that are minimally processed, such as chopped, roasted, canned or frozen foods may still be nutritious, heavily processed foods provide less in the way of beneficial nutrients and more saturated fat, sugar, salt and other unhealthy ingredients.

Partial list of processed foods

- Most packaged breakfast cereals
- Cakes

- Candy
- Cheese
- Crackers
- Donuts and pastries
- Fast food
- Deli meat
- "Fruit drinks"
- Pizza
- Potato chips
- Soft drinks

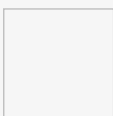
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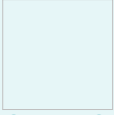
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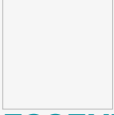
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