

HOW LONG CAN YOU LIVE?

YOU had a mother and a father, two grandmothers and two grandfathers. Take the number of years that each of these ancestors lived, add them together, and divide by six. The result will give you—very roughly—your hereditary life expectancy.

Having obtained this figure of the number of years you can expect to live, probably the best thing you can do is to throw it away and forget it—after allowing it to impress the lesson that heredity is a powerful factor in determining a person's span of life. Indeed, the only other factor is environment, which includes the things you eat and drink and the bacilli you bump into.

The rule given above is a fairly accurate statistical method of determining the influence of heredity on life expectancies over a large number of cases. But in your particular instance it may not mean a thing. More than likely the figure errs on the side of permission. Grandfather may have died in a fall from a haystack. Grandmother may have died from ingesting typhoid germs. These are environmental accidents which do not in the least depreciate the

bumptious durability of your own germ plasm.

What you inherit in the way of a constitution, and what you do about that inheritance are two entirely different things.

Nevertheless, statistics become extremely fascinating when they set out to tell us how long we may expect to glorify the earth with our presence.

To begin with, you have one chance in 100,000 of living to be a hundred. That chance is better if you are a woman; two out of three centenarians are of the so-called weaker sex. One explanation is that life, except for childbirth, imposes fewer hazards on women.

If you want to live to be sixty-four, you have a fifty-fifty chance. Out of 100,000 persons, 50,000 reach that age. Better yet, if you have reached sixty, statistics give you an additional fourteen and a half years, if you are a man, or an extra sixteen if you are a woman.

The odds that you will reach the age of fifty are four to one; 75,000 out of 100,000 attain that age. It is exactly the reverse—one chance in four—that you will live to be seventy-

seven; 25,000 out of 100,000 live that long.

A baby born today can expect to live sixty years. A hundred years ago life expectancy was only thirty-five years. In 1854 it was forty.

Medicine knows how to protect infants from childhood diseases, and people in general from infections, giving more persons a chance to live out their biological life-span.

All animals, including man, have an inborn, natural span of life. It begins with conception and ends with death. To be born is to begin to die. This is neither pessimism nor optimism, merely nature.

Chickens live from three to five years. Dogs are senile at twenty. Mayflies live twenty-four hours. A carp may live 150 years. Each week of a laboratory rat's life is equivalent to one year of a human being's. Thirty years is average for a horse and a turtle may live three centuries. The normal life span of man is between fifty and eighty years. Which of these extremes you tend towards depends largely upon your choice of ancestors.

Is there nothing you can do to increase your natural span of life? Will big muscles make you live longer? Can you exercise yourself into nonagenarianism or diet yourself into an

added decade beyond your biological inheritance? Unhappily, there is not an iota, not a jot or tittle, nor a chemical trace of proof that you or I can do any such thing. But by sensible living we can keep from passing away before our time.

The findings of life insurance statisticians, of Prof. Raymond Pearl, and of other scientists, support the conclusion that, by and large, the following make for long life:

Lower blood pressure and slower pulse than average.

Long-lived parents.

Thin body build.

No hard physical labor after forty.

Abstention from alcohol, or merely moderate indulgence.

Non-use of tobacco.

The right occupation.

Sensible diet, no overeating.

Optimism and sufficient rest.

Absorbing interests.

Good luck as regards accidents.

The most important of these—long-lived parents—is beyond individual control. Parents are between two and three times as important as grandparents in handing down a long-lived heredity. If your grandfather and grandmother lived to be eighty, that's fine—but it's much better if your father and mother did.

And as between parents—not that you have any choice about it—a long-lived mother is to be preferred to a long-lived father, as far as your chances of attaining advanced age are concerned.

Persons who die young are, as Prof. Pearl has pointed out, quite literally bad eggs, in the biological sense.

But you can do something about most of the other items if you really want to live on to the very last possible minute. You can even violate some of them with possible impunity; many centenarians have done so. But you can't tell which ones to flout.

The mind does not age so swiftly as the body. That is why age does not come so swiftly to the man whose hobbies, work, or interests keep him alert. You can actually live longer if you have some absorbing interest; more accurately, you can keep from dying too soon.

If I'm putting on weight, I can curb a tendency to overeat, realizing that persons who live to advanced ages are almost invariably of thin, wiry build.

As I grow older I can eat more meals, but consume less at each sitting; my digestive system will appreciate it. At the

same time I will have to make sure that my slenderer meals are properly balanced with vitamins and minerals.

If I would rather live long than enjoy my pipe, I surrender tobacco, which, according to Prof. Pearl, definitely impairs life expectancy. This same authority on longevity says that alcohol in moderation will not shorten life, but that in excess it definitely does so.

Some 2,000 case histories of nonagenarians and centenarians studied by Prof. Pearl show that some of these long-lived persons ate gluttonously, others sparingly; some drank heavily and some didn't; some got a lot of sleep and others didn't—in short, they showed about the same variations in habits as people in general.

But in one respect the long-lived *did* differ from the general run of mankind: "The vast majority of these extremely long-lived people" (again quoted Prof. Pearl) "were of a placid temperament, not given to worry."

Which led him to the following generalization: "*The length of life is generally in inverse proportion to the rate of living.*"—Paul Anderson, condensed from *Your Life*, New York.

