

# Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto

By Erica Miller, Ph.D.

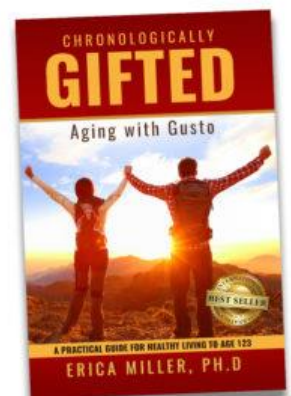
Scientific studies have proven something exciting and worthy of everyone's attention: People can literally live about seven years longer if they would simply refuse to "buy in" to the stereotypical nonsense that tells them that getting older has to mean life is over. According to studies performed by Becca Levy at Yale University's School for Public Health, a pervasive (even subconscious) negative stereotype regarding aging has a demonstrable effect on long-term health outcomes. In one study, participants were separated into two groups. One group was exposed to subliminal, positive messages about aging, while the other group was not. The results were incredible: participants in the second group—people who were otherwise equal on health, educational, and socioeconomic factors—showed greater declines in a variety of areas than their peers who were in the first group. There were physiological symptoms, like shakier hands and poorer memory retention, higher rates of cardiac disease, and more difficulty recovering from disability. But there were also behavioral symptoms like a greater propensity to eat in an unhealthy way, a more sedentary lifestyle, and an unwillingness to follow dosage instructions for age-related prescription medications. The net result? A median difference in survival rate of 7.5 years. That's staggering!

## Change the perception

Tune out the negative. Focus on the positive. Instead of using the word "old," substitute "wise," "mature," "seasoned," and "experienced." Think about it: elders are typically revered for their accumulation of knowledge and experience. Even those who haven't accomplished much of special merit exhibit a time-tested combination of cultivated skills and experiential wisdom that rightly inspires humility in younger people (who do well to capitalize on their insights). So, almost by default, age demands a modicum of respect.

Learn to approach the later years with optimism and determination, recognizing that no one ever has to lose their cultural edge. After all, people are living longer, healthier lives every day, all over the world. Think about it: a huge part of why aging seems to come upon people suddenly and overwhelmingly is because they don't take steps now to give them the best possible chance of living long, healthy, and meaningful lives.

Consider the aging process with a healthy mixture of acceptance and enthusiasm. This mind shift leads people to live happier (and often longer) lives. Known as the chronologically gifted, these people regard their age as a gift, the seal of a lifelong journey for which they are profoundly grateful. It's a journey that began at birth and one that they hope to continue through a personal legacy that immortalizes them in the



memories of others. Facing their own mortality, the chronologically gifted are determined to live with significance, passion, and purpose in the here and now.

## 10 principles of the chronologically gifted

What you are to be, you are now becoming. Follow these 10 principles to live happier, healthier, more fulfilled lives.

1. *Get rid of the phrase, "I'm too old for that."* Eliminate it from daily vocabulary and from all thinking. Instead of approaching old age as an imposition of new limitations, focus on opportunities to overcome challenges and acquire new skills.
2. *Find a reason for getting up in the morning.* It's important for everyone to figure out what it is that makes him or her tick when others want to just give up. Write it down. Create a life mantra. Anytime the difficulties of life threaten to overwhelm, let an inner sense of purpose be the reminder that life matters now.
3. *Connect with something bigger.* In addition to daily pursuits and occasional travel, volunteer for a worthy cause. Plug in to a spiritual community. Meditate. Pray. Read thought-provoking books that address life's "big questions." Get in touch with a Higher Power.
4. *Look on the bright side.* Embrace a positive style. Hardship is temporary. Victory is just around the corner. Find little reasons every day to be grateful for life—even in the face of negativity. Resolve to live mindfully and savor the best gifts that life has to offer. Focus on solutions, not problems.
5. *Get moving.* No excuses. Pick a physical activity that brings true enjoyment and real passion, and do it—regularly. Take a lot of walks. Use the stairs. Bike to the store instead of driving. Plant and tend a garden in the backyard. Find ways to incorporate low-intensity exercise of all kinds (strength, balance, and aerobic) into daily life to ward off the potentially debilitating effects of aging.
6. *Stay fueled.* Eat more fruits and vegetables and fewer simple carbohydrates. Avoid processed foods. Drink lots of water and an occasional glass of red wine. Serve smaller portions. Don't eat "on the go." Put unhealthy foods out of sight and out of reach to purge temptations.
7. *Create personal [Blue Zones](#).* A home can be organized to facilitate good sleep, healthy eating habits, and spiritual well being. Get rid of excess technological "noise," and create a space for meditation. Shed the clutter and add some greenery. Invest in comfortable pillows and light blocking drapes for the bedroom. Display pictures of family and friends and souvenirs of treasured life experiences.
8. *Don't do it alone.* Connect with like minded, loyal, authentic people who will help their loved ones reach their goals. Spend time with them weekly. Share their burdens, and vice versa. Rejoice in victories together. Learn to forgive, and reach out to estranged family members before it's too late to be reconciled. Life is too short for grudges.
9. *Believe in yourself.* Give credit where credit is due. Focus on becoming the best you can be. Remember, obstacles are only temporary setbacks that can be overcome.
10. *Seize the day.* Live today as though it really matters. Don't do anything to cause regret, and don't let fear prevent the full experience of life right here and right now.

Remember, becoming chronologically gifted is an individual decision and choice. For those who are ready, print these principles out. Tape them to the refrigerator—and get busy living. You won't be sorry. You can do it!

## About the Author



Dr. Erica Miller holds her Ph.D. in clinical psychology and has written extensively on topics of positive psychology, longevity, overcoming challenges, and living life to its fullest. Her most recent book, "Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto," made her an international bestselling author. In addition to having a private practice, Dr. Miller was the founder and executive director of Miller Psychological Centers, a chain of mental health clinics throughout Los Angeles and Orange County. Currently, in addition to public speaking, she is CEO of a family real estate business in Austin, Texas. For information, please call 805 496-8850 or visit [www.drericamiller.com](http://www.drericamiller.com).