# experts highlight diet quality and gut health as keys to longevity over trendy hacks



Hacking one’s health in the pursuit of longevity often results in a bewildering array of trends and advice. From cold plunges to sauna baths, and the insistence on walking 10,000 steps daily, various health regimes offer conflicting messages. Among these, Bryan Johnson, the leader of the Don’t Die initiative, exemplifies a more extreme approach by indulging in a plethora of supplements while meticulously avoiding treats.

Amidst this cacophony, the link between diet and longevity is equally contentious. Some advocate a meat-heavy diet, while others, like Walter Willett, a nutrition researcher at Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health, caution against it. “Meat is like radiation,” Willett has noted. “We don’t know the safe level.” In stark contrast, Walter Longo, director of the Longevity Institute at the University of Southern California, promotes a largely vegan diet accompanied by low protein intake and time-restricted eating, suggesting meals be confined to an 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. window.

Faced with such disparate advice, one might wonder how to optimise their diet for health and longevity. Dr. Frank Hu, a Harvard professor of nutrition and epidemiology, asserts, “Certainly there is no one-size-fits-all diet that’s best for everyone.” However, various dietary patterns exist that can help prevent chronic diseases and enhance longevity.

Understanding the reasons behind dietary recommendations unveils the foundational role of nutrition in ageing. Lucy Joslin, a nutritionist and head coach at Cali Kulture, states, “Diet is more than fuel — it's the foundation of how well you age.” Similarly, Anna Markusson, a clinical nutritionist at Bettervits, emphasises the critical influence of food on longevity. She claims, “If we can't survive without food, imagine the power the right food has on our longevity. Diet plays a pivotal role because it directly influences every system in the body: metabolic health, inflammation, immune function, brain ageing, gut health, and even the rate at which our cells age.”

While the allure of anti-aging creams and LED face masks continues to grow—projected to exceed $2 billion by the end of the decade—investing in a healthy diet remains unparalleled. The primary principle across diverse diets aimed at longevity is the reduction, if not elimination, of ultraprocessed foods. Such items, often laden with sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats, muddy the waters of optimal health. Dr. Hu observes, “Nowadays ultra-processed foods are everywhere in our food supply,” and their detrimental health impacts cannot be overstated.

Protein, too, plays a vital role in longevity. Joslin notes, “Muscle is an organ for longevity,” underscoring the need for adequate protein intake as we naturally lose muscle mass with age. Ensuring propitious gut health is increasingly recognised, with studies linking a balanced gut microbiome to immune function, digestion, and mental wellbeing. Markusson articulates this connection, stating, “Emerging studies show that a diverse microbiome can reduce inflammation, improve nutrient absorption, and lower the risk of chronic diseases—all vital for healthy ageing.”

For those seeking a clear dietary roadmap, three expert-endorsed diets stand out for their potential longevity benefits. The Mediterranean diet, rich in antioxidants and polyphenols, has been heralded for its role in preventing degenerative diseases and enhancing brain health. Research highlights that adherence to the Mediterranean diet is linked with a lower risk of mortality, reinforcing the idea that diet quality profoundly influences longevity.

The Planetary Health Diet further elevates this dialogue by advocating a focus on minimally processed plant foods alongside modest meat and dairy consumption. This diet not only promotes personal health but also addresses environmental sustainability, an increasingly vital aspect of our food choices. The push for plant-based diets is echoed across various studies, demonstrating their efficacy in reducing chronic disease risk and promoting longevity.

Ultimately, embracing a balanced, nutrient-rich diet and eschewing ultraprocessed foods appear to be cornerstones for promoting longevity. By prioritising whole foods, maintaining a healthy gut microbiome, and ensuring adequate protein intake, individuals may find the keys to a healthier, longer life.

### Reference Map

1. Introduction to health trends and Bryan Johnson.
2. Importance of diet and the Mediterranean diet.
3. Planetary Health Diet and its lifestyle benefits.
4. Discussion on the health impacts of Western dietary patterns.
5. Emphasis on plant-based diets by Dr. Frank Hu.
6. The relationship between diet quality and mortality risk.
7. Healthy eating patterns and food quality for longevity.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/best-diet-for-longevity-1> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/05/much-of-life-is-beyond-our-control-but-dining-smartly-can-help-us-live-healthier-longer/> - This article discusses how improving diet quality can reduce the risks of chronic diseases and mortality, thereby enhancing longevity. It highlights the benefits of the Mediterranean diet, rich in antioxidants and polyphenols, in preventing degenerative diseases and promoting brain health. The piece emphasizes that a combination of regular exercise, a healthy diet, and maintaining a healthy body weight are essential for slowing the effects of aging.
3. <https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/planetary-health-diet-associated-with-lower-risk-of-premature-death-lower-environmental-impact/> - This study led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health researchers found that adherence to the Planetary Health Diet, which emphasizes minimally processed plant foods and modest consumption of meat and dairy, is associated with a lower risk of premature death and reduced environmental impact. The research underscores the importance of dietary patterns that promote both human health and environmental sustainability.
4. <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/02/feature-healthy-plate-planet> - This article examines the environmental and health impacts of Western-style dietary patterns, which are high in calories, processed foods, and meat. It discusses how such diets contribute to biodiversity loss, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emissions. The piece highlights the inefficiency of red meat production and advocates for plant-based diets to promote both personal health and environmental sustainability.
5. <https://lifesciences.csoftintl.com/blog/drfrankhu-csoft-2024/> - In this discussion, Dr. Frank Hu emphasizes the benefits of plant-based diets, such as the Mediterranean, DASH, and MIND diets, in promoting longevity and reducing the risk of chronic diseases. He highlights the importance of consuming healthy fats, reducing red and processed meat intake, and focusing on unprocessed or minimally processed foods to support healthy aging.
6. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2800411> - This cohort study found that greater adherence to various healthy eating patterns, including the Mediterranean diet, was consistently associated with a lower risk of death. The findings support the recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans for multiple healthy eating patterns for all individuals, emphasizing the importance of diet in reducing mortality risk.
7. <https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/diet-quality-healthy-aging/> - This article discusses how overall diet quality, particularly the consumption of unprocessed or minimally processed foods like vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes, supports healthy aging. It highlights the role of healthy fats, such as those from olive oil and avocados, and the benefits of polyphenols found in plant-based foods in promoting longevity and reducing the risk of chronic diseases.