

A T&C Roundtable

WHAT DOES AGE MEAN NOW?

A candid conversation about...

Plastic Surgery, Longevity, Supplements, Obesity, Wrinkles, Youth, Money, Hot Bodies & Happiness

I. THE AGING MYTH

AG: What you all have in common is that you think that what we laypeople think of as inevitable symptoms of aging—sagging, wrinkles, lack of sexual desire—are in fact not inevitable at all.

FL: Absolutely. We're at the point now where we can not only prevent many of these changes but reverse them as well.

FB: A couple of weeks ago I had a new patient: 67, in great shape. I get a whole history. She's

the first person I've ever known to survive pancreatic cancer. She changed her whole life. She's on three pages of supplements, she meditates every day, she runs. She said, "I had to change my whole life." She's a survivor.

GB: I'm a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia. I study loss and trauma, all the bad things you can imagine: 9/11, traumatic injury, bereavement. And over and over the research has proved that people are not only

remarkably resilient, most cope with these things extremely well. And this is a secret that the world doesn't seem to know.

FL: Being healthy means being resilient, not just emotionally but physically. When I see patients, what's important is not whether they get sick, it's how quickly they respond. The whole concept of resilience is something we don't talk about in Western medicine, but it's really the key to aging and staying healthy.

The Panel

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II. HOW TO STAY YOUNG

AG: If you were the emperors of the world and had the power to command the populace to do or take three things to counter aging, what would you command?

FL: Slow down, whether it's with meditation, yoga, or some relaxation technique. Downshift. Second would be to move mindlessly every day, even if it's a walk. I say that rather than *exercise* because people have a problem with that word. But movement is key. As well as eating a plant-based diet. And eating less in general. Stop when you're 80 percent full. One more point is taking the right supplements, which can help tremendously. [*Editor's note: Lipman recommends, for starters, a multivitamin, vitamin D, fish oil, and probiotics.*]

FB: I'm definitely a believer that you can't separate the external from the internal, that they go hand in hand, and if you want to live your optimal life you have to really take care of everything. You can't just paint the house; you gotta treat the foundation! We eat so much sugar. It ages you internally in the blood vessels, the heart, the kidneys, the brain, and it also externally ages your skin. Everyone thinks fruit is so healthy—and it is—but the amount we're eating is so much more than we need.

AG: How much is too much fruit?

FB: A bowlful of berries a day would be more than enough. The other thing is for everyone to take high doses of antioxidants, because you can't completely prevent free radical damage. It's from pollution, it's from the sun, it's from stress. Those things—and smoking—generate free radicals that take electrons from your body that are stable and cause them to become unstable. It affects your DNA, it affects the mitochondria—the energy-producing cells in your body—and it causes aging. Finally, do exercises that lengthen the muscles instead of tensing them, which will also keep you young.

JK: You do need exercise every day, both for cardiovascular health and to keep your arteries nice and flexible. And you also need strength training, because we're so sedentary. And balance training. That's why we do tai chi in our practice. I had a grandmother who lived to be 95 years old. She ran a farm, did heavy housework every day. If we needed a chicken, she'd go out and kill the chicken, pluck it, and cook it that night. She was a perpetual movement machine. While genetics are responsible for 40 percent of aging, epigenetic studies have shown that

the majority of aging is due to lifestyle factors within our control. Most important is the effect of aging on the brain. Age 40 marks the onset of decline in areas of memory and learning. But by learning something new in middle age, we encourage brain growth and stop brain decline. Things like traveling to a new place, learning a language, or taking a continuing education class are not only enjoyable, they actually keep the brain young. The message here is: This is not your mother's aging. Be proactive! Tackling age is more than a cosmetic makeover; it's building a foundation of health.

GB: Can I ask a question? There was a study at Harvard by Ellen Langer, who's a psychologist. She took a group of chambermaids in the Boston area. She had half of them do what they normally do. The other half she told, "This is great exercise you have here. Your work is a great workout." And that group had enormous health benefits. They lost weight, they were healthier, they had greater cardiovascular fitness—all because they thought of what they did as working out. I don't understand why that is.

HH: I know this study, and I'm really intrigued. Her whole focus is positive thinking, the power of positive mindfulness. I think they're doing a movie on some of her studies. It's also related to stress. Stress is really aging. The mind-body connection when it comes to aging has been underexplored. That's not to say you're not going to get wrinkles if you're a positive thinker, but we're trying to understand it.

FB: You just have to think positively out of the sun.

HH: Exactly.

AG: When I think about the relationship of stress to aging, I think of the president of the United States. If you watch Jack Kennedy—two and half years into his presidency he had aged 10 years.

FB: Oh, that's the most aging job in the world! [*All agree.*]

AG: Let's continue with the magic bullets for antiaging.

GB: We associate getting older, classically, with not having much fun. I think one thing is to give ourselves the luxury—the opportunity—to explore different interests and values. It's very easy to think of ourselves in fairly narrow terms. And all the research I'm involved in suggests that the more narrowly we conceptualize ourselves, the more likely it is that we feel we've

lost. Flexibility is another important antiaging factor. The world is constantly presenting us with new challenges. And we have to be flexible about how we deal with them. I'm also interested in expression and suppression of emotion. We have this idea that expressing ourselves is crucial to health. But it's not really what the literature shows. Suppressing is also very important in all kinds of situations. It predicts how well people will deal with adversity.

FL: I like the concept of flexibility of mind, body, attitude.

GB: One begins to see this in everything. The earlier evolutionary models showed that a good adaptation was one that was stable, but now it's pretty clear it's actually one that's flexible.

EB: I came to the conclusion along the way that belief systems are critical, so my wishes are that I would like everyone to believe, first, that you're only as young as your oldest part. The current physical exam is not done by computers; it's all done by hands, and it's inadequate. And the next wish would be that everyone recognize that there is no radar in the human body or brain. Unfortunately, we're not able to detect all our illnesses, and depending on our feelings is unreliable. Most people operate on the mediocre principle that the only organs in need of a checkup are your colon, your prostate, your cervix, and your breasts.

FL: If I were the emperor, I would not want to create another system that instills fear in the public and such a reliance on the medical system. I would empower people. That's what I love about meditation, yoga, and teaching people at Rancho La Puerta for the last 10 years. The people with the healthiest minds are those who exercise most of the time. Instead of having everyone tested, I'd say, "Exercise more."

III. WHEN DOES OLD BEGIN?

AG: So when does aging begin? When, in your practices, do you have people coming in saying, "I feel old. I look old?"

EB: Twenty-two. The transitional stages to menopause begin at 22, and then it's full blast by 30.

AG: Are you saying perimenopause begins at 22?

EB: Perimenopause really is beginning at 22—that's your peak fertility and peak hormonal state. By 30 the majority of women have significant bone and muscle loss, some changes in skin and hair texture, immune system

changes, and precancer cysts. The reality is that health maintenance, if it's going to shift, has to begin with frankness. That means you have to let women know that their hormonal status is changing significantly by 22. Men have until maybe 35, but they have other problems in the development of their emotional IQ that makes them extremely infantile at 22.

HH: To answer your question, no matter what the molecular progression of aging is, in my practice I see it between 30 and 35. That's when people notice...something.

FB: I agree with that. They say, "My skin is changing. The texture is changing. I notice some lines. I'm not as firm as I used to be."

HH: Or some people say, "I'm starting to look tired."

FB: They just know they don't look the same. And that's our job, to instruct them as to what's happening.

AG: How does a patient know when she's going too far?

JK: Some don't. And it looks a little awful.

FB: Well, the problem is you never notice the good work. You always notice the people that are done badly. So many people are afraid to have their lips done because they notice only these abnormal ones on TV. In all fairness to our profession, it's not how much is done, it's what is done and who does it. You can do a lot and look very natural, or you can do a little and look pretty unnatural.

JK: Isn't there a certain beauty to aging? To the natural aging process? In Europe it's much more that way.

HH: I'm not exactly sure about that. For a long time European women have been way ahead of us when it comes to taking care of themselves. Maybe they're not doing as much surgery, and maybe their view of what's attractive is a little bit more moderate—which I agree with. It's not just that they've been aging naturally. When we were doing nothing here they were already ahead in facials and skin care and beauty regimens. I don't necessarily agree with the idea, "Oh, in Europe everybody just lets everything go and they age naturally." That's a misconception. They're actually very vigilant about it from earlier on. Even though I'm a plastic surgeon, I think it's a completely respectable position to say, "I'm never going to do anything to intervene with my personal, natural aging." But I think that there's another misconception that everyone who has surgery is somehow indulgent or

egotistic. I have women and men in my office every day who are amazingly well-adjusted, mentally healthy people who haven't aged as well as you or me or Diane von Furstenberg. It's a valid point that you should be able to live your life looking how you feel.

IV. IS AGE A DISEASE?

EB: The general principle we follow is that aging is a disease.

GB: It's not possible for aging to be a disease if everyone has it. Then life is a disease.

HH: I think it's a process. It can be a diseased process, but in and of itself it's not a disease.

EB: No, you're confusing development with aging. Development is not aging.

HH: But it is. You have to define until what age you're developing, and then from what age you're aging. You can't be developing until you're 100.

JK: It comes down to epigenetics—how your diet effects your DNA. There's a sameness to young brains, and there's a sameness to old brains. But there's a big window in between, from 40 to 70 years old, where some brains look like old brains and some brains look like young brains. There are things we can do to keep our brains young and healthy, like following the Mediterranean diet.

FL: Can I expand a little? There's one thing I want to talk about, which is finding meaning in life and a purpose in life. Because that cuts through a lot of this and has a lot to do with antiaging. When people have meaning in their lives, when they have a purpose, I don't care if they have a 20 percent-blocked carotid artery. How vital they are and how they live their life is more antiaging than anything.

FB: People give up if they don't have a goal. When you're young you have all these goals, but then you start dropping them and wanting to stay with the status quo. That ages you. And just getting back to what Dr. Hirmand was saying, it's not a bad thing to want to look good. As you age you start looking angry or upset or tired, and you don't necessarily feel that way.

AG: I think my bias against cosmetic procedures is a suspicion that if you need them, you're not accepting reality. The years are marching on, no matter what.

HH: You're going to have to come to my office for a week. The patients are looking to feel a little bit better.

FB: But in all fairness, it becomes addictive,

because it's as if you're redecorating a house. You fix one thing, then you start seeing others. You're not going to make them look crazy, but if someone comes in for the lines around her lips and you fix that, then the lines around her eyes start bothering her, and there's no problem fixing that also.

FL: You're right. I think people have to deal with that reality. To be quite honest, I was against all the surgery, but I've learned over the years that everyone's different. Some people actually feel much better about themselves. It does help them.

FB: You would never color your hair if you wanted to accept the way you look. Nobody would go to the beauty parlor.

HH: But there is a problem, in the sense that our field has become very commercialized. There are financial incentives. If there weren't, internists wouldn't be injecting people with Botox over the weekend. The other thing I'm going to say is that I do fear this dangerous trend of distorting what the aesthetic ideal is. At a party I ran into an interior designer who's very prominent who said to me, "When did really weird-looking lips become acceptable? When did that become the aesthetic norm?" And it's true. We are in some way affecting how people are aging, but we're also affecting how people are looking. I think the responsibility is on us to educate.

GB: Getting trendy cosmetic surgery is really just announcing that you've had cosmetic surgery. It's a status marker.

AG: Youth is the status marker.

GB: It depends. When many people get older, they become less preoccupied or worried about aging—they become much more oriented toward other people. They begin to value relationships much more.

FL: In *The Blue Zones*, the book in which Dan Buettner went around the world and found these cultures where people lived healthily into their hundreds, the people all moved, they had purpose in life, they had a social network, they had some spiritual exercise, common beliefs, family—the tribe was important. This is exactly what I see in my practice. It's less about the medicine and more about who we are, what's important to us, how we think. Everything we're talking about.

EB: Do they still look like raisins, though?

FL: You know what? If you're a happy raisin, you're a happy raisin.