**How “Old” is Your Body?**

**By Dr. Ramona Warren**

How “old” is your body?

That may seem like a strange question. The answer should be as simple as the number of years you have been alive. However, while you may be 25, 50 or 75 years of age, the cells that make up your body are actually much younger. The human body is continually replacing cells. Research has shown the average age of our cells to be 10 years or less.

The rate at which the cells regenerate is determined by the function of the cell, as well as how hard the cell has to work. For example, our skin is continually being replaced because it is constantly being impacted by outside forces. In fact, in just a few milliseconds, over 50,000 skin cells have been replaced. Skin cells regenerate so quickly that the epidermis (outer layer of skin) is renewed every 14 days. The cells lining the stomach are replaced every five days. Our red blood cells only live an average of 120 days. Every 300 to 500 days the liver regenerates completely and the entire skeleton is replaced about once every 10 years.

There are certain cells that remain the same throughout your lifetime and do not regenerate. These include the neurons of the cerebral cortex, the cells from the visual cortex of the brain, and possibly the muscle cells of your heart. Although it has been believed for a long time that the brain did not regenerate, it was discovered in 1998 at the Salk Institute in California, that neurogenesis, or brain cell regeneration, does occur. The region of our brain associated with memory -- the Hippocampus -- does create new neurons.

So, the obvious question that comes to mind is “Why don’t we live forever?” One of the main reasons we don’t live forever, even though our cells keep replacing themselves, is because there is a limit to how many time a cell can replicate. Each time a cell divides and replaces itself, the telomeres on the chromosomes get shorter. Eventually, the cell is no longer able to divide.

The following tips well help you keep your cells in the best condition for as long as possible:

* Get 7 to 8 hours of good quality sleep each night
* Eat healthy, well-balanced meals focused on vegetables, moderate amounts of quality protein, small quantities of fruits and nuts, and plenty of water.
* Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day in a way that gets your heart rate elevated. This is one of the best ways for adults to maintain healthy brain cells.
* Exercise your brain daily by completing crossword puzzles, committing to learning something new, playing bridge or other thought provoking card games. Keeping your brain active helps keep your brain young.
* Make sure you have adequate levels of magnesium, which has been shown to improve the connections in the memory center of the brain. Magnesium is also helpful for many other body functions, including the cardiovascular system. Research has shown this mineral is involved in over 600 functions throughout the body.
* Manage your stress. We all experience stress, the key is how we manage it. Studies show that over 80 percent of all doctor visits are stress related. Some healthy choices for relieving stress include deep breathing, listening to quiet music, stretching, yoga and laughter. Stress is a major factor in the aging process.