

A FREE GUIDE FROM DR. JAMIE KNIGHT

# An Introductory Guide to Healthspan

*Five small practices to extend the years you live well.*



**DR. JAMIE KNIGHT, PHD**

Founder, Olfactory Health · [drjamieknight.com](http://drjamieknight.com)

# What is healthspan?

Most people are familiar with the term *lifespan* — the number of years you live. But *healthspan* is the number of years you live **in good health** — free from chronic disease, disability, and cognitive decline. It's the difference between simply living long and living well.

In this short guide we'll cover how to think about healthspan from a scientific, psychological, and deeply human perspective, and then I'll give you five practical practices to start extending your own. Simple habits, repeated over years, will improve how well you age.

## The healthspan equation

Healthspan isn't about avoiding illness. It's about maintaining function, vitality, and connection for as many years as possible. That means investing in four interconnected systems:

**01 Cognitive health.** Memory, attention, processing speed, creativity.

**02 Physical function.** Strength, mobility, stamina, balance.

**03 Emotional resilience.** Regulation, purpose, stress response.

**04 Social connection.** Intimacy, community, belonging.

Improving healthspan means investing in all four — because decline in one almost always cascades into the others.

# Your first five healthspan habits

There's no quick fix — and anyone telling you there is an easy way is probably trying to sell you something. But there are beautifully simple practices that, done consistently, build the kind of life you actually want to grow old in. A life with vitality, connection, and capacity.

Five evidence-based practices follow. Each takes the next page on its own — because each deserves your full attention, even briefly.

*Start with one. Add the next when the first feels automatic.*

*Consistency beats intensity, every time.*

*After James Clear, Atomic Habits.*

# 01

## Walk every day

### The science

Walking is the unsung hero of longevity. It improves cardiovascular health, preserves mobility, and supports memory by increasing blood flow to the brain. There is no other intervention this cheap, this accessible, with this much evidence behind it.

### The practice

Aim for 8,000 steps a day. Even 4,000 makes a measurable difference. The walk doesn't have to be fast — but it has to be regular.

Related pillar: *Smell & The Brain*



# 02

## Train your sense of smell

### The science

Olfactory decline is one of the earliest detectable signs of neurodegeneration — preceding memory symptoms by up to ten or twenty years. The good news: training your nose actually rebuilds neuroplasticity in memory-related brain regions. Yes, smell training can grow your brain.

### The practice

Five minutes each morning, four distinct smells (rose, eucalyptus, lemon, clove is the classic protocol). Sniff each for 10–15 seconds. Do it for at least 12 weeks before you decide if it's working.

Related pillar: *Smell & The Brain*



# 03

## Prioritize deep sleep

### The science

Sleep is your body's repair system. Chronic sleep debt accelerates biological aging and impairs memory consolidation, immune function, and emotional regulation. The deep stages of sleep are where the brain physically clears metabolic waste — including the proteins implicated in Alzheimer's.

### The practice

Aim for 7–8 hours. Wind down with no screens for the hour before bed. If sleep is hard for you, that's worth taking seriously — and it's almost always changeable.

Related pillar: *Smell & The Brain*



# 04

## Strength train twice a week

### The science

Muscle mass is one of the strongest predictors of long-term function and survival. After age 30 we lose 3–8% of muscle per decade — unless we train. The good news is that the body responds to resistance training at any age. There is no cutoff for starting.

### The practice

Two sessions a week, 30–45 minutes each. Focus on big compound movements: squats, deadlifts, push-ups, rows. Bodyweight is fine to start. Add load as you adapt.

Related pillar: *Smell, Healing & Recovery*



# 05

## Invest in relationships

### The science

Social isolation is as risky for your long-term health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Connection isn't a soft variable — it is one of the most studied protective factors for both mental and physical health across the lifespan.

### The practice

Schedule at least one meaningful conversation or in-person connection each day. Small. Specific. Boring on a Tuesday. The compounding effect over years is enormous.

Related pillar: *Smell & Connection*



# The psychology of aging well

Longevity is as much in the mind as the body, and aging well means how we think about aging matters. People who hold positive views of aging live, on average, 7.5 years longer than those who hold negative views. That's a larger effect than many medical interventions.

Reframing aging — from a slow decline into a deepening of relationships, purpose, and wisdom — has tangible effects on health behaviour and outcomes. The body listens to the story you tell it.

*Healthspan is a mindset as much as a metric.*



# Small changes, big impact

You don't need a perfect routine to extend your healthspan. You need consistency over intensity. Build slowly. Layer habits. Celebrate each small win. The goal is to live fully — now and for as long as possible.

## Want to go deeper?

**The Scent Letter** is my newsletter on the science of smell, brain health, memory, and what it means to age well. One letter every season.

[drjamieknight.com/the-scent-letter](https://drjamieknight.com/the-scent-letter)

## About Dr. Jamie Knight

Dr. Jamie Knight is a researcher at the University of Victoria and the founder of **Olfactory Health**, Canada's first not-for-profit dedicated to olfactory science, patient support, and healthcare-system advocacy. She writes about smell, brain health, memory, and what the science tells us about staying sharp as we age.