

YOUR NEXT 10 YEARS

James H. Carraway, M.D.
Eastern Virginia Medical School

Our lives move along from day to day, and we essentially live that day while spending some amount of time planning for the upcoming years. We plan for retirement and the inevitable loss of friends or family as we get older, but not many people have a definite plan for their body, their health, and their appearance over the long run. When I see patients who come in for aesthetic surgery, I try to assess them in terms of a 10-year plan. The idea is to think about goals over that period of time to see how healthy they can be and how good they can look when that time has passed. The reasons for this are obvious. You might think if you're 55 or 60 that in 10 years you may not even care. Wrong! Most people care as much 10 or 20 years later as they did when they originally began considering alteration and improvement of the aging process.

Because of this concept of setting goals for one's self for the future, I have begun to think in terms of the next 10 years for myself, my family, my patients, and those people with whom I discuss this whole process. In relation to the appearance of both face and body, it is easily possible to predict the areas of aging and how they will affect your appearance over the years. For example, if you look at your picture from 10 years ago and you did not have any fullness in your jowls or beginning heaviness in your neck, you are seeing the slowly evolving addition of fat to these areas. This stretches the skin because fat grows directly underneath the dermal layer where the circulation exists, and it gives laxity to skin as well as the full or hanging jowls or neck look. Additionally, this also happens with the fat that hangs from the back of the arms, the hips, and the abdomen

If you can consider over a 10 years period what weight gain of 1 or 2 pounds a year will do, it could let you easily gain 15 or 20 pounds over that period of time which would allow fat to deposit itself in these preferential areas of the body. How do you avoid this? By keeping your lean body mass up with activity and exercise and by keeping your weight absolutely stable over the years. This is more easily said than done, but people who are capable of doing this understand that if you put calories in by eating and do not burn them, the body saves it as fat. By not exercising, the natural atrophy of muscle tissue will cause a reduction of muscle mass unless you exercise and stay active.

Muscle mass depends not only on activity to maintain it, but on the diet that is eaten. For example, if you are on a "starvation" diet or a low-calorie diet that provides minimal protein, your body will use your own muscle protein for internal "food." What most good and well-rounded diets such as the Zone, South Beach, Weight Watchers, and many others have in common is that they provide a little bit of protein each meal along with carbohydrates and fat. Of course, this takes some planning and commitment on your part so that every day this plan can be fulfilled.

Additionally, when you look at your skin, you know that you have possibly suffered some changes of aging and that you don't have the "glow" that you may once have had. If you look at your skin through a high-powered magnifying glass, you will see that there are small deposits of pigment which darken your skin slightly and let you lose the glow.

By careful exposure to sunshine and protection with a good level of sun screen to your exposed body, you can protect your skin from excessive sun damage. If you don't do this, in 10 years consider how much exposure you will have and how much damage will be done. Along with using protection from ultraviolet light, nourishing topical nutrients for the skin can also be helpful. There are many creams available for replenishing vitamin C, vitamin A, vitamin E, and alpha lipolic acid into the skin which tend to help the aging process as well. When the skin is exposed to ultraviolet light, there is a local reaction which generates free radicals. Topical vitamin C will help scavenge these free radicals with an "antioxidant" effect and will help protect your skin. Of course, an antioxidant-rich diet is a necessary part of the plan.

Along with ultraviolet protection, if you look at some of the creases and lines that develop around your eyes and mouth areas and beside the nose, these are most intensified if your weight is excessive and if your skin is relaxed from excessive sunshine or smoking. If you want to look as good in 10 years as you do now, you might want use Botox around the eyes from time to time to decrease the wrinkles and to make you more aware of what causes them. You might also want to consider fillers around the lines in the mouth areas such as Restylane or fat grafting. This will help keep the skin and creases smoother, and over a 10-year period there doesn't need to be much change in these.

In terms of nutrition, it's not only body weight we have to worry about, but also the nutrient status of the body. For example, if you take sugar in your coffee, maybe 2 teaspoons 3 times a day, that's 60 extra non-nutrient calories per day (which amounts to 1800 extra non-nutrient calories in a month). Drinking alcohol in the form of 1 or 2 glasses of wine a day lets you pick up another 3000 calories per month. If you add hydrogenated fat found in packaged goods such as snacks and cookies, you can add many more calories (these are mostly empty calories). The best approach is to think of eating only nutrient-based food and eliminating most of the empty calories, because over a 10-year period you can build up vast amounts of non-nutrient caloric intake which actually takes away from your health status and deposits fat in its place. Be suspicious of everything you eat in terms of whether it is going to be helpful to your system or not. If you get up in the morning and look at a bagel with jam, it's probably not as good a choice as fruit, nuts, and an egg. A snack of cheese and vegetables would be a better choice than a couple of crackers and a Coke. Always look at the nutrient value of everything that you eat.

Of course, mental activities fall into this same category. Keep your mind sharp with new activities and always think about ways to challenge yourself without too much stress and with attainable goals of completion. This, along with a good nutrient diet, taking your fish oil capsules, and staying physically in good shape will keep your mental status good. Other supplements are also important and should include a multivitamin, vitamin D, and a good calcium source every day.

In my practice it has been such a pleasure to see so many people who have taken good care of themselves and over a 10- to 20-year period look just about the same as when they began their 10-year plan of preserving themselves. In this group of people you will find many happy and productive lives, and they are a motivation for others as they set the

example for doing so well. It will require daily maintenance to achieve your 10-year plan, but it is certainly worthwhile over the long run.