

Daily News Opinion

To live a century, take care of your body

"The trick is to live to be one hundred," said the late comedian George Burns. "Very few people die after that." Fortunately, Burns made it past the 100 mark, laughing all the way.

It wasn't until I reached 90 last summer that I realized my days were numbered, and I had to get busy on my unfinished projects list. I can no longer say that I will get so-and-so done in the next 10 to 20 years.

One of those goals is to share the lessons I have learned regarding health and fitness.

People often ask why I look so young. I assure them that the credit goes to my wife, Ermalee. In addition to being a wonderful partner and mother of our six sons, she is a great reader and is fascinated by health and longevity. As a result, we have always had a disciplined diet and have explored several alternative health procedures.

In 1977, I wrote in a column in this newspaper that my approach to health is based on three disciplines: diet, exercise and state of mind.

Starting out in life on a Kansas farm, I worked in the fields with my dad from the age of 8. Since then, I have always enjoyed hard work and working out. As a teenager and a high school athlete, I figured that regular exercise might not make me live longer, but I

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**WALLY
HICKEL**

COMMENT



would die healthier.

I started working out with a punching bag, a jump rope and weights. As I got older, my exercise routine evolved into a walking regimen in the summer and snowshoeing in the winter.

These days I mostly do stretching exercises and receive deep muscle massages. I am convinced that if you don't use your body and care for it, it gets rusty. You literally "use it or lose it." No matter what your age, you've got to keep your body moving.

These views are reinforced in a new book "The No Nonsense Guide to Fitness" by Steve Colwell, a physical trainer in the Pacific Northwest who has helped senior citizens for many years. He has designed an exercise plan to "put old on hold" and urges all of us to find the physical activity we enjoy the most and stick to it.

In the forward, Walter Bortz II, M.D., the former president of the American Geriatric Society, explains that humans are the only species in the world that no longer has to move in order to eat.

"This stark reality has led inevitably to our global obesity epidemic," he writes. And obesity is said to cost the U.S. \$147 billion annually in health care.

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Colwell says his program can be done at and around your home or anywhere, at no cost. His approach is to mix common sense with a sense of humor. His book is packed with one-liners such as Cary Grant's observation that, "If I had known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself."

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He enthusiastically urges all of us, regardless of age, to make "the rest of your life the best of your life." I heartily agree. My experience is that the great discipline of exercising keeps you disciplined in other things as well.

When it comes to a state of mind, the ability to laugh at oneself is essential, and no one has surpassed George Burns when it comes to poking fun at oneself as we get older.

"I want nothing to do with natural foods," he said not long before he passed away. "I need all the preservatives I can get."

Walter J. Hickel with Malcolm Roberts. Hickel served as governor of Alaska from 1966 to 1968 and from 1990 to 1994 and as U.S. Secretary of the Interior from 1969 to 1970. He can be reached at wjhickel@gcl.net.