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How to Get Five Years Younger In a Day

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If not quite the promise of eternal youth, the pitch was still seductive. "We will show you how simple, easy steps that fit into your current lifestyle can add years to your life expectancy." That, plus a chance to find out my actual "biological age" was the draw of the Princeton Longevity Center in Princeton, N.J.

I'm at an age, 32, where the scary stuff that plagues my family, like cancer and heart disease, seems years away. But that's an ideal age, say antiaging clinics, to start fighting the march of time. The goal: to catch any susceptibility to disease when there is plenty of time to prevent them.

For \$1,500, I'm expecting a lot. Before my appointment, I fill out 23 pages of medical questions. (Sample question: Does anger occasionally affect your driving?) And I'm directed to keep a food diary. (Dear Diary: Today I ate pizza and cupcakes.)

First stop: the physical. I am poked and prodded by medical director David A. Fein as he dissects everything from my mom's osteoporosis to my own yoga-heavy exercise habits. Though he actually takes time to answer all questions about my medical history -- something I never got in previous drive-by exams -- he is unsympathetic when I protest that the cupcake and pizza are aberrations: "Everybody says that," he says.

(Of course, this is from a doctor's office that serves champagne with lunch, but more about that later.)

Next is a visit to the center's nutritionist, who feeds my food diary into a computer program that analyzes the nutrients and spits out a bar graph that is depressingly easy to read: too much fat and too many carbohydrates. "The carbs are going to age you," says Dr. Fein. So-called high glycemic carbs (instant rice, french fries and, weirdly, watermelon), he says, cause insulin levels in the blood to rise sharply. Constantly high insulin levels can lead to glucose intolerance, inflammation, obesity and other ominous-sounding conditions that no one wants.

The way to avoid them: the diet no one wants to eat. The nutritionist suggests going heavy on fruits and vegetables (high in antioxidants), and fish, especially salmon and tuna, which have a lot of Omega 3 fatty acids, which help cholesterol levels. The center also recommends a multivitamin and other supplements.

At the fitness assessment, things get really personal. My "exercise physiologist," Christopher Volgraf, an energetic 25-year-old, wastes no time on formalities. "People come in here and say, 'I exercise a lot and I'm flexible,'" he says. "Then I rip them apart." I stand in front of him in a joga bra and shorts while he gives me his

judgment: "Flat right foot. Hyperextended right knee. Rounded shoulders." He counts how many push-ups I can do in a minute (only 11) and measures the flexibility of my joints. The diagnosis: tight hamstrings and calf muscles and pathetic upper body strength. The prescription? Crunches, bench presses and bicep curls.

My outsides having been thoroughly dissed, it is time for the electron beam tomography machine, which looks like a big metal doughnut. You slide in -- jazz music playing in the background -- for a test that measures calcium deposits in the arteries, an indicator of early heart disease. It's controversial both because it's expensive (\$450) and because it doesn't catch some types of plaque that can cause heart attacks. The result: no plaque, not surprising considering my age and gender.

After a lunch of salmon, salad, bread and cookies (are there hidden cameras?) -- plus a glass of Perrier Jouet champagne poured by the X-ray technician -- Dr. Fein summons me into his office for the verdict. "So you're a healthy person," he says. Better yet, I'm a younger person. Dr. Fein proclaims my biological age to be 27.2, nine months younger than my kid sister. That alone was worth \$1,500

