

10 Habits of People Who Live to 100 | Part 1: Your Body

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

284 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

I have discovered the secret of living to a hundred.

Already?

Already.

It is goat's milk.

Goat's milk.

Goat's milk, from a specific island, drunk at a specific time of day.

There was a whole article.

Can I tell you something about that article?

You are going to ruin this.

I am going to ruin this completely.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox, the podcast that trains your English while you live your real life.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

For four episodes, we told you that relationships are the foundation of a good life.

And that is true.

But you also live in a body.

So this is a bonus conversation, in two parts.

Ten habits of people who live to a hundred.

Today, the first five.

The body.

Next time, the mind.

And before any of them, we have to talk about the goat.

Go on then.

For twenty years, there has been a very famous idea.



That there are certain places in the world where people live far longer than anywhere else.

Sardinia.

Okinawa.

A place in Costa Rica, a Greek island.

Those places became an industry.

Books, documentaries, cookbooks, supplements.

And you are about to tell me it is not that simple.

In twenty twenty-four, a researcher at University College London received an Ig Nobel Prize for challenging the data behind those places.

What prize?

The Ig Nobel.

The Ig Nobel.

That is the funny one.

It is the funny one.

It is given for research that makes you laugh, and then makes you think.

His analysis was a preprint, which means it had not yet been peer reviewed.

And what did his analysis argue?

It argued that those regions had something in common, but it was not diet.

What was it?

Poverty.

Low literacy.

High crime.

And, most importantly, terrible birth records.

Say that last part again.

In the United States, more than five hundred people had been registered as being over a hundred and ten years old.

And?

Newman's analysis said only seven had a birth certificate.

Seven.

Seven.

Out of more than five hundred.



And there is a detail I find almost beautiful.

When he looked at the birthdays of the world's oldest people, they clustered on dates divisible by five.

Because if you are inventing a date.

You invent a round one.

Oh, that is wonderful.

That is terrible, but it is wonderful.

When he collected the prize, he joked that the real secret to extreme old age was to move somewhere with no birth certificates, teach your children pension fraud, and start lying.

Now, to be fair.

To be completely fair.

The researchers who study those regions have answered him.

They have.

They say his work misunderstands how ages were validated.

They point to civil records, church archives and detailed family histories going back to the eighteen hundreds and earlier.

So it is an argument, not a conclusion.

It is an argument.

And we are telling you about it because we would rather give you an honest debate than a comfortable story.

So no goat's milk.

No goat's milk.

Then what do we actually know?

We know a lot, and it comes from studies that are not glamorous at all.

Give me the best one.

Harvard, one hundred and twenty-three thousand two hundred and nineteen people, followed for up to thirty-four years.

That is a lot of people.

They looked at five simple things.

Never smoking.

Half an hour of movement a day.

A healthy weight.

A decent diet.

And moderate alcohol intake.



Five things.

Nothing exotic.

Nothing exotic.

Nothing you cannot pronounce.

And what did the researchers estimate for the people who had all five?

At the age of fifty, women with all five were estimated to have about fourteen more years of life expectancy than women with none.

Fourteen years.

And men, about twelve.

That is an estimate, not a guarantee.

Exactly.

It is observational evidence, not a promise about any one person's life.

But the difference is still striking.

It is.

The secret is not a secret.

The secret is boring.

The secret is so boring that nobody can sell it to you.

And that is the good news.

Because boring is repeatable.

Right.

Habit number one.

Ready.

Move all day.

Not only for an hour.

Explain the difference, because I think this is one of the most misunderstood ideas in health.

Most people think of exercise as a separate activity.

You put on special clothes, you go to a special place, you work hard for forty minutes, you come home, and then you sit down for eleven hours.

Which is what I do.

Structured exercise is useful.

But many people who stay active into older age never separated movement from daily life.



Their life made them move.

Stairs, gardens, markets, children, walking to places because there was no other way to get there.

So it is not only about the gym.

The gym is useful.

But one active hour does not make the rest of the day irrelevant.

Your other waking hours matter too.

Give our listener something concrete.

Take the stairs when that is comfortable for you.

Get off the bus one stop early.

Stand up when you are on the phone.

Spend a little more time close to the floor instead of always choosing the sofa.

Close to the floor?

Close to the floor.

Hold that thought, because it is habit number two.

Habit two.

Keep your muscle.

This is the one nobody talks about enough.

And it is one of the things that can help you stay independent as you grow older.

Tell them why.

From around fifty, muscle mass and strength tend to decline if we do nothing to challenge them.

Quietly.

And you do not notice at first.

You do not notice, until one day the shopping bag feels heavy, and then one day the stairs feel hard, and then one day getting up from a low position is difficult.

And that is when life can get smaller.

That is when life can get smaller.

So is there a simple movement our listener can notice at home?

There is, but only try it if getting down to the floor is safe for you.

Keep something stable nearby, or ask someone to be there.

Sit down on the floor, cross-legged if that is comfortable, and then stand up again, using your hands as little as you safely can.



Right now?

Only if it is safe.

Well?

I am down.

And?

Getting down was a success.

And getting up?

Getting up involved a sound I have never made before.

Was it a word?

It was not a word.

So what is the principle?

Use your muscles in ordinary life.

Carry your own shopping when the weight is appropriate for you.

Take the stairs when you feel steady.

If getting to the floor is safe for you, practise the movement gradually.

If you enjoy the gym, include resistance training at a level that is appropriate for you.

And if you are sixty-five and you have never done this?

Start gradually, and get professional advice if you have health, pain or balance concerns.

But yes, you can still get stronger, because muscle can respond at any age.

That is one of the kindest facts in all of this.

Habit three.

Eat mostly plants, and stop a little early.

I am going to ask you not to give anybody a diet.

I am not going to give anybody a diet.

We are not doctors, and your body is not the same as anybody else's.

So what is the broad pattern?

In many populations that age well, food patterns are simple and repetitive.

Beans, lentils, vegetables, whole grains, some fish, a little meat, not much sugar.

Food your grandmother would recognise.

That is a useful question, even if it is not a perfect rule.



If your grandmother would not recognise it, it may be highly processed.

And the second half.

Stop a little early.

In Okinawa there is an old phrase that people say before eating.

It means, more or less, eat until you are eight parts full.

Eight out of ten.

Eight out of ten.

Then you pause.

Fullness signals take time to build, so slowing down can help you notice when you have had enough.

So the habit is not a strict diet.

It is paying attention before you reach the point where you wish you had stopped.

Habit four.

Protect your sleep.

And here is where everybody says seven to nine hours, and everybody feels guilty.

Seven to nine is a useful general range for many adults.

But there is something people talk about less, and it matters too.

What?

Regularity.

Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time.

Even at the weekend.

As much as real life allows, yes.

A body with a stable rhythm is less confused than a body whose schedule changes constantly.

And what is happening while we sleep?

A lot of maintenance.

Some systems involved in clearing metabolic waste from the brain become more active during sleep.

Researchers are still learning exactly how that process works in humans.

So sleep is not doing nothing.

Sleep is the maintenance shift.

And nobody who is good at their job skips the maintenance shift for thirty years.

And habit five.



Habit five is two subtractions.

Things to remove.

The first one is not controversial at all.

Do not smoke.

Nobody argues with that one.

In the Harvard study, smoking was one of the strongest individual risk factors.

And the second subtraction?

The second one is the one people do not want to hear.

Alcohol.

For years, the story was that a glass of wine a day was part of the secret.

It appeared in many longevity books.

And now?

That idea has weakened a lot.

The World Health Organization's position is that no form of alcohol consumption is risk-free.

That is quite a change.

It is a big change, and I am not here to tell you what to drink.

But we are here to tell you what the current evidence says.

And the evidence no longer supports presenting wine as a health habit.

Can I introduce somebody?

Please.

Genaro is seventy-nine, and he was a caretaker in a building in Valencia for thirty-four years.

He has never been inside a gym.

Not once?

Not once.

He climbs eight floors on foot, because he did it every day for thirty-four years and now his legs are confused if he takes the lift.

He walks to the market because it is the market, not because it is exercise.

He eats the same six meals he has eaten since nineteen seventy-four.

He goes to bed at eleven and gets up at seven, and he has done that for fifty years.

And he can stand up from the floor without using his hands, because he plays on it with his grandchildren twice a week.



So he follows the spirit of all five habits.

And if you asked him, he would tell you he has no habits at all.

He would say, this is just my life.

And that is the target.

Not a programme.

A life that happens to include these things.

Right.

Three sentences, about habits.

Listen, and repeat in the pause.

Sentence one, for something you are starting.

I am trying to get into the habit of walking after dinner.

Sentence two, for something you are reducing.

I have cut down on it, but I have not given it up.

Sentence three, the principle.

Small changes every day beat big changes once.

All three again.

I am trying to get into the habit of walking after dinner.

I have cut down on it, but I have not given it up.

Small changes every day beat big changes once.

To get into the habit of doing something.

And notice it is doing, not do.

To cut down on something is to do less of it.

To give something up is to stop completely.

And most real life happens in between the two.

And our sentence of the day.

Ready?

You do not need a new life.

You need a better Tuesday.

You do not need a new life.

You need a better Tuesday.



One more time, with us.

You do not need a new life.

You need a better Tuesday.

So, five habits.

Move all day, not only for an hour.

Keep your muscle.

Eat mostly plants, and stop a little early.

Protect your sleep.

And two subtractions.

And your task this week is not all five.

Choose one.

Choose one, and make it so small that it would be embarrassing to fail.

One flight of stairs, if stairs are right for you.

One more regular bedtime.

One simple meal built mostly from plants.

Next time, the other five.

Purpose, rest, learning, belonging.

The habits that live in your mind.

And one of them, we can tell you now, you are already doing right this second.

You just do not know it is on the list.

Everything from today, the transcript, the vocabulary, and the three sentences, is waiting for you at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

You can listen and read without registering, and a free student account gives you the downloadable PDFs, flashcards and progress tools.

Thank you for spending this time with us.

Take the stairs, if the stairs are right for you.

See you in the next one.

