

# Flourish or Fade

A guide to total well-being  
for women at midlife and beyond

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**DISCLAIMER:** The information provided in this book is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor, healthcare professional, financial advisor, or lawyer. You are encouraged to discuss any concerns you have with a qualified professional.

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## Chapter 1

# Embracing Aging

*Do not resent growing old; many are denied the privilege.*

— Irish Proverb

**N**o one teaches us how to age. We learn from the media, our elders, and our personal experiences. Usually, our introduction to “old age” is when we are young and have grandparents in our lives. I was fortunate to have four grandparents up until I was twenty-nine. These natural intergenerational relationships were healthy and positive ones. I was able to witness firsthand the cycle of life. We are born, we grow up, we get old, and we die. I saw each of my grandparents go through the “old age and die” stage. They all lived into their eighties. I see growing old and dying as a natural part of life.

In addition to what we see in our own families and communities, we observe how older people are treated at work and, in turn, how older people act at work. Retirees may have different priorities from younger folks. Senior family members are perceived differently than the younger ones. Our older relatives have a wealth of history, stories, and “ways of life” that are different from our own. Our intergenerational relationships in our workplaces, communities, and families can help us become more understanding of the other generations’ needs.

### **When Does Midlife Start?**

Some people ask me, “When does midlife start?” That’s a good question. I think the answer is within ourselves. It’s subjective. If we don’t feel “young” anymore, yet we don’t feel “old,” I would think that would mean we are in our “middle” years. For some women it may start at menopause. Midlife may last well into our sixties! I know for myself, at 55, I identified with the “new-old,” because I qualified for senior discounts. I don’t “feel” old, but I am certainly not young. Midlife started for me around 40.

### **Aging Well—Total Well-Being**

Aging well (and living well) encompasses more than just the physical aspects. It’s more than “active aging.” Women, especially, get caught up in the physical-looks department (beauty, wrinkle-free skin, and body weight). In North American society, it is very easy to slip into that trap. Sure, body image is a big part of our lives. I don’t deny that. What I want to emphasize here is that there is more to it.

### **Ageism**

In North American society, we are bombarded with ageist or anti-aging messages that are ultimately harmful. Our culture is obsessed with youth and beauty. Older people are sometimes valued less in our society (the COVID-19 pandemic exposed this tragedy), and it should not be this way. I strongly advocate for valuing each individual—no matter what age they are. If we don’t,

we are only hurting our future selves (if we are gifted with living a long life). If we change our attitudes and enhance the way we age, we can embrace the process. If enough of us (and I know there are a few!) speak up, speak out, and encourage others, we can shift a whole generation of people who will celebrate and revere old age. We are learning how not to be ageist; now, we have to learn how to be anti-ageist.

## Age Accelerators

There is only one proven way to *stop* growing older, and most of us say we don't prefer that alternative. Growing older is a natural process. There will be normal genetic wear and tear on aging skin, hair, joints, bones, organs, etc. The aging process is normal, and these are non-modifiable changes and deterioration. For example, how do you *stop* your hair from greying? Learning how to accept these changes is a big task for some of us. (You *can* dye your hair, though!)

Extrinsic factors and lifestyle factors can make you feel like you are aging more quickly than you would have if these things were not in your life. Age-accelerators can hasten the aging process and may even shorten our lifespan. There are modifiable factors (things within our control). We need to learn what those things are. It will be different for everyone.

For example, thinning hair is a genetic condition. There will be people who can't do anything about it. On the other hand, hair can fall out because the person is under tremendous emotional stress. If we remove the stress, the hair will become full and healthy again. My hair thinned when I was undergoing immense stress. I was also undergoing chemotherapy and radiation at the time, so once I got through that, my hair eventually grew back.



Aging is inevitable.  
Take charge of the  
way you age to lessen  
its impact.

We live our lives as if we will live forever. Some of us take a more proactive approach to illness prevention, and we take heed. There are lifestyles we choose that are healthy and those that are less healthy.

Take smoking, for example. Some people smoke, and although there are warnings everywhere (including the packaging), people continue to smoke. I have heard my brother call cigarettes “cancer sticks,” as we all know they increase the risk of developing cancer. Even secondhand smoke is dangerous. One 91-year-old woman I talked to said, “It doesn't really matter if you smoke or not. Some people live well into their later years even though they smoke. It doesn't mean you are guaranteed a cancer diagnosis. It just increases your risk.” When we encounter conflicting advice like this, it makes it hard to follow the experts' advice.

We also know that a sedentary lifestyle—think “couch potato”—also puts you at a higher risk for developing health problems. In 2002, the World Health Organization warned that physical inactivity is a leading cause of disease and disability. Decades later, this is still the case, and, sadly, people are not taking heed. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS.gov) reports only 33% of adults meet the physical-activity recommendations. Shockingly, only 33% of children are physically active every day. I believe and understand that even if you stand up once every 30 to 60 minutes or so, it is better for your health than sitting and doing nothing (excuse me while I stand up and stretch for a bit—you should, too!).

Following is a list of age accelerators, which are modifiable by lifestyle choices.

**Age Accelerators:**

- ◆ Too much unprotected exposure to the sun
- ◆ Smoking
- ◆ Sedentary lifestyle (too much sitting or long periods of inactivity)
- ◆ Problematic use of alcohol or drugs
- ◆ Overeating/unhealthy diet/lack of staying properly hydrated
- ◆ Loneliness
- ◆ Inadequate amount of sleep
- ◆ Stress
- ◆ Holding anger and resentment
- ◆ Negative attitude towards aging
- ◆ Refusal to accept the changes that come with aging
- ◆ Refusing to wear hearing aids or glasses
- ◆ Wrong assumptions of what is “inevitable”
- ◆ Loss of purpose
- ◆ Limitations we put on ourselves due to “our age”
- ◆ Harmful ageist stereotyping

Knowing what those age-accelerators are and applying a systems approach to total well-being can help you live a long, happy, and contented life. I will show you how you can do this by using the *Flower of Wellness* Method designed for women at midlife and beyond.

**The *Flower of Wellness***

I first learned of the “wellness wheel” method years ago, when I went to see a counsellor during a stressful time in my life. To feel whole, balanced, and content, I learned that I needed to take a closer look at all areas of my life—body, mind, and soul. She had me complete an exercise that included a closer look at several areas of my life, such as physical, career, spiritual, emotional, etc. I remember taking the time to fill out that questionnaire, and I realized at the time I didn’t have any recreational or leisure activities. I didn’t understand what spirituality really was. The counsellor shed light on what I didn’t even know I was missing. She pointed out where my life was out of balance and what I needed to do to feel more balanced. The tool she used with me was designed for younger adults. This experience planted a seed in me, which I have nourished over the years.

Years later, after revisiting this “balanced” approach to well-being, I couldn’t find anything geared to those in middle-to-later years. I also noticed that sexuality wasn’t addressed in the way it should be. I have since developed a wellness-wheel approach that is very comprehensive and includes the issues that come with aging. I call it the *Flower of Wellness*, and, for this book, I have tailored it to women at midlife and beyond.

Bloomers take charge of the way they age by pursuing fulfillment and satisfaction throughout their lives.

I encourage you to embrace aging with all its wonder, challenges, and opportunities.



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