Healthspan may be more integral to your well-being than lifespan. Here is how to lengthen it

The craze to live longer is having a moment.

That moment is, partly, a result of advanced medicine and technology that can help extend lifespan, says Dr. Shoshana Ungerleider. It’s also spawned by the rich, who have chosen not to succumb to the game of life, but to try and beat it—spending millions on longevity treatments and making dramatic lifestyle changes not accessible to the masses.

But solely focusing on lifespan can have a damaging effect, impacting people’s well-being as they age, says Ungerleider.

“It is important to approach the longevity movement with a critical mindset and recognize that the pursuit of longevity should not come at the cost of quality of life. The pursuit of immortality can lead to a focus on quantity over quality of life and can detract from the meaningful experiences and relationships that make life worth living.”

Healthspan vs. lifespan

Lifespan is the number of years someone lives from birth until death, while healthspan is the number of years someone is healthy without chronic and debilitating disease. Often, people use these terms interchangeably, or solely use lifespan.

“While life span is a certainly an important measure of health and well-being, it is not the only one,” says Ungerleider.
“Health span is increasingly being recognized as an important concept because it emphasizes the importance of not only living a long life but also living a healthy and productive life.”

Lengthening healthspan starts with thinking about aging well holistically, meaning prioritizing physical health, mental health, and daily lifestyle factors all in one. It also means prioritizing ways to feel joy and connection, which can reduce stress and the risk of chronic health conditions.

“You can’t just look at one or two factors that might make you live longer, but ignore other things,” she says. So if you’re eating a rigidly nutritious diet but forgoing social connection and getting outdoors, you may be thinking of healthspan all wrong.

Seeing the longevity movement as an investment in our daily well-being and health can push healthspan and lifespan to, one day, increase in parallel.

“It is important to remember that aging is a normal and natural process that should be embraced rather than feared or avoided,” she says.