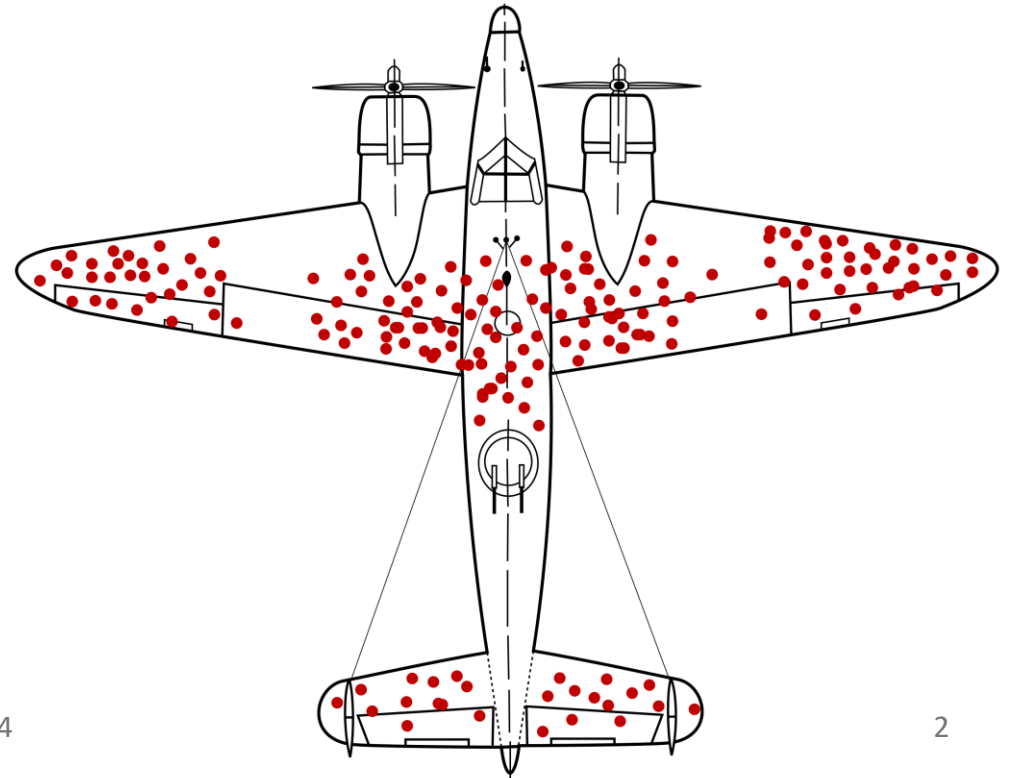


The Aging Programmer

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Disclaimer

- Advice that worked for me might not work for others
- People who have left an industry aren't here to say "that doesn't work for me"



Not Just My Experience

- I did a survey
- I found studies and papers
- I talked to people including people who have left

- Still, this advice might not work for you
- Use your judgement



“But I’m young!
What does this
have to do with
me?”

“If you’re not
getting older,
you’re dead.”

—Tom Petty

We Don't All Get To Be Old Programmers

- Some people just die
 - Presumably you'd like to prevent that
- And we don't all keep programming as we age
- Some people have to retire
 - When they don't want to – there's nothing wrong with choosing to retire
- Some people change industries
 - This isn't always bad

Survey Results

- For their bodies, most people were concerned about
 - Eyesight
 - Pain and stiffness
 - Stamina
- For their minds, most people were concerned about
 - Motivation
 - Cynicism



Body Issues

- Not all problems with your body are really problems with your body
- People discriminate against you when you use a mobility aid
 - Mobility problem or environment problem?
- Can't drive at night, might have to retire
 - Eye problem or environment problem?
- No strength for multiple flights of stairs to meeting rooms, bathroom, coffee etc,
 - You problem (knees, ankles, cardio vascular fitness) or environment problem?
- Are you too old for this work, or just for this workplace?

Eyes

- Get them checked
- Getting shorter sighted as you age is totally normal
 - Presbyopia
- Use “cheaters” or “readers” at first
- Get glasses so you can keep driving
- It’s normal to have different glasses for different tasks
- Bonus:
 - Your mystery headaches may disappear
 - You may have less confusion caused by not quite following what you’re trying to read
 - You can get more code on the screen again

Night Driving

- Can become a problem in your 50s
- Yellow glasses and other gimmicks do not work
- Some is caused by cataracts so will get better when they are fixed
- Avoid contrast changes
 - Lit screens in the car are the worst
 - Choose your car carefully
- Keep your glasses windshield etc spotless
- Vitamin A
- Think about shorter office time so you go home in the light
- Think about a post-driving life and how you would still do things
 - May need to move eventually

Exercise Helps Your Body and Brain

- Aches and Pains
- Stamina
- Ability to reach things, bend down get up
- Immune system
- Mood
- Learning and remembering

“Those who think they have no time for bodily exercise will sooner or later have to find time for illness.”

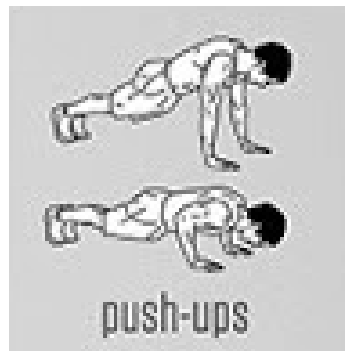
—Edward Stanley (1826-1893)

Not All Exercise Is The Same

- Exercise serves different purposes and not all exercises give you all benefits
 - Strength
 - Stamina
 - Flexibility & Balance
 - Visible Muscles
 - Weight Loss
 - Training or practice for a skill or activity
- Choose what exercise you do to achieve your overall goals

Strength

- Do a small number of hard things, not to failure but close
 - Eg 10 pushups when you feel you couldn't do 11
 - 60 second plank when you feel you couldn't do 70
 - 3 times a day, just a minute or two, you will get stronger
 - No need for hundreds of reps or hours of work
- Learn how to make exercises easier and harder
 - Angles are the key
- Strength enables independence
 - Carrying something with one hand means the other is free
- People with more muscles have stronger immune systems
- Weight bearing exercises strengthen your bones
- Stronger people live longer
 - Older people with weak hand grip were 50% more likely to die



Stamina

- Do something that makes you a little out of breath
- 20 minutes a day or more
 - But any amount helps
- Sustained aerobic exercise increases adult neurogenesis
- Moderate exercise in midlife or late life reduced odds of having mild cognitive impairment
- Physical exercise (both aerobic and resistance exercise) improved cognitive function in the over 50s, regardless of the cognitive status of participants
- Messengers like myokines, dopamine, noradrenaline and serotonin make us feel good and improve our ability to learn

Flexibility and Balance

- Needs deliberate exercising
 - Not just activities that happen to be “good exercise”
- Lay the groundwork now
- You will need this in your 70s and 80s
 - To reach the top or bottom shelf
 - To catch yourself when you trip
 - To avoid strains and injuries
- Stretching exercises are pleasant
 - Great way to start your day

Wrists

- Don't sleep with your wrists curled
- Consider a brace
- Ration your keystrokes
- Try different mice & keyboards



Back to Those Aches and Pains

- Getting older can hurt
 - Literally and metaphorically
- For literal pain, that's what painkillers are for
 - Naproxen (anti inflammatory) associated with aging better
 - Longer term, exercise to reduce joint and muscle pain by strengthening muscles and increasing flexibility
- Consider your equipment (chairs, desk, etc) and replace things that cause you pain. Invest in yourself.

Hearing



- Mild hearing loss can cause:
 - Not following group conversations and just letting the others talk
 - Feeling confused because you missed something but don't want to ask
 - Avoiding places where there will be competing noises
- Get your hearing checked
- Can't regain lost hearing
- Can wear hearing aids
- Prevention is simple: avoid really loud noises
 - Use earplugs when you can't avoid them
 - Keep your headphones at a sensible volume

Health

- Infections and injuries may not worry you now
 - But they are what will probably kill you
 - Falling especially is the beginning of the end for older people
- People with more muscles are less likely to fall hard
 - And have stronger immune systems
- Prevention habits start now, then persist
 - Footwear for the occasion
 - Don't be embarrassed to use railings or slow down
 - Vaccinations (not just for babies!)
 - Mask when you're sick, and in crowds
 - Wash your hands a lot
- Regular checkups and screenings for other things that may be underway

Menopause

- Will happen to half of us
 - Starts in 40s or 50s
- Can last a long time
- Is not something to tease someone about
- Don't have policies that make it harder
 - Dress codes
 - Rigid hours (some people get insomnia and other sleep issues)

Health Habits

- Don't smoke
- Wear sunscreen (and hats)
- Drink alcohol in moderation if at all
- Drink plenty of water
 - But don't count litres or set alarms
- Eat your veggies (and fruit!)
 - Vitamin C, but more importantly fibre
- Avoid “ultra processed” foods
- Don't overwork
- Try not to obsess on anything

Other People

- Age discrimination is real
 - “they assume I can’t learn”
 - Pressure to move to management
 - “hiring process stopped once they saw grey hair”
 - “you wouldn’t be a culture fit”
- For women, it can be worse
 - Men get to be “distinguished” and “experienced” some times
- More of an issue in a corporate job
 - Some companies have technical ladders
 - Consulting is a popular option



What If You are “Other People”?

- Your attitude towards old people can affect your own old age
 - People who believed negative stereotypes about old age in their younger years had a much greater chance of having a cardiovascular event, such as a stroke or congestive heart failure, decades later
 - Believing pessimistic concepts of old age results in a 50 per cent greater chance of being hospitalized in later life compared with people who think positively about it
- Learning about aging, and working towards a happy and healthy old age, can be a self fulfilling prophecy

Brain and mind issues

- For most people these are scarier than the body changes
- We make our livings with our minds
- Losing that capacity is terrifying
- But it's not inevitable

Short term memory, working set

- Make sure your issues aren't actually vision, hearing, or lack of sleep
- Habit and routine
 - A place for everything, and everything in its place
 - Use technology – scripts, alarms, appointments
- Checklists and process
 - But not “simple 27 step” procedures you have to keep in your head
- Don't rely on multi-tasking so much
 - Focus on one thing if that's what it takes
 - Understand when you've stopped paying attention to the first thing, and fix that
- Learn coping techniques from ADHD and others
 - Tried and trusted ways of helping you achieve things your brain is fighting you on
- Do brain games help?
 - Sadly, no
- But learning you enjoy does
 - And so does reading for joy

Keeping up with constant “new stuff”

- You can learn it if you want to
 - If you don't, that's a different issue
- By now you've learned how to learn
- You can connect new stuff to old stuff
- Is your identity tied to the old stuff?
- Embrace change
 - Even with the same tools, there are new ways of thinking
- Your work identity is what you do, not what you do it with



Moods

- Grumpiness, Impatience, Cynicism, Distractibility
- These are not inevitable
- If you're sweet and generous now, you'll be a sweet old person
- If your planning and preparation ensures your needs are met, you'll be able to be warm and generous
- If you're backstabbing selfish and greedy now, you probably won't get nicer
 - Unless you actively work on it starting now
- Your personality generally intensifies as you age
 - Don't expect it to "flip"

Sleep

- Still the very best debugger
- Also is when you heal
- You may need more, you may need less
- There is no moral component to this
- Get as much as you need
 - 1 month of good sleep made people feel 6 years younger

It's Not Always "Thing 1"

- Not everything is because of your age
 - Or some diagnosis you're living with
- People still hurt their knees, catch viruses, have side effects of meds
 - These things can be fixed!
- Don't put up with something
 - Oh well, I'm old, I guess I'm just in constant pain now
 - Oh well, I'm old, I guess I just can't think properly now
 - Oh well, I'm old, I guess I just can't do that now
- And you can develop new things (eg allergies)
 - Investigate them, and get treatment if possible

Life comes at you fast

- Your plans, I'm sorry to say, can be taken from you
- Having resources makes a big difference
 - Strength, physical and emotional
 - People you can rely on
 - Money, assets, and a line of credit
 - Skills (technical, emotional, communication, practical)
- Lets you focus on a sudden urgent new priority



Loss

- You're going to have funerals to attend
- Companies are going to close
- Friends will move away, change, or die
- They will stop making that ice cream you love
- You won't be physically able to do certain things you loved doing

- The only cure for loss is gain

“Well something's lost, but
something's gained
In living every day”

—Joni Mitchell, Both Sides Now

Make New Friends

- The only cure for loss is to seek out new gains
- If you're not making new friends at work how will you make them?
- When you're 85, you'll want a 60 year old friend
 - Or even 40!
 - To drive you places and lift your heavy groceries
 - To help connect you to that youthful energy
- Hobbies
- Home (neighbours)
- Reconnect with family (and their friends)



Try New Things

- New activities
 - New TV shows or streams
 - New games
 - New foods
 - New people to be around
 - New places and sights
-
- They won't all stick, but some will turn out great



“Getting old is like climbing a mountain; you get a little out of breath, but the view is much better!”

—Ingrid Bergman

The Good Parts

- You probably have more time and money
- They play your music in the grocery store
- People's assumptions about you might be in your favour
- You can get away with things
- You are less afraid
- People have less power over you
- You can give things up if you want

For a Long and Happy Old Age

- Exercise
 - for your body and your brain
- Save money
 - While still doing “stuff” now
- Eat well and care for yourself
- Make friends
 - Keep making friends, don't stop
- Find a purpose
- It's not too soon
- It's not too late

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