

# HEALTHmatters

## The triumphant elder manifesto

by Tim Keim

**T**he premise of The Triumphant Elder (TE) is that men and women over 60 can live vigorous lives unafflicted by the common diseases of aging like hypertension, heart disease/stroke, cancer, kidney disease and cognitive decline. Furthermore, the triumphant elder is one who is independent, living on their own, pursuing life with purpose, zest and enthusiasm.

The diseases above are mostly lifestyle maladies and can often be reversed or prevented. This column is a call and manifesto to you who aspire to live triumphantly, to you who want to put the gold in the golden years. That gold is the investment your life has deposited within you by decades of hard-won experience. That gold is also the faith and determination to not go quietly into that dark night, but to seize the light of this day to establish self-care regimens customized to our personal needs that prevent disease and heal existing sickness.

The greatest legacy we can give our children and grandchildren is not our money and property, but our health, our wisdom, our love and affection. Indeed, the bequest of our lucid, vibrant presence IS our most precious gift to the future.

Reversing disease to reassert our claim on health is challenging, but it can be done. Decrepitude is a choice. The adventure of reclaiming our vigor is not found in a pill or a procedure, it is found in our daily habits of eating clean, whole foods cooked with love and intention. It is in the way we move our bodies every day, the sweat that cleanses our tissues and how that movement stimulates our organs and glands to metabolize waste to refresh the deep tissues of the viscera. It is found in moments of deep meditative silence each day to cultivate clarity of mind and regeneration of the brain. It is found in our desire to matter in a world where we are supposed to have “retired.”

As you may have already found out, our economic model includes an unhealthy measure of ageism. Get to a certain age and you may be quietly assigned to the



ranks of the ineligible for meaningful work just when you have the most to contribute. It's a time when we might feel obsolete. I know many of us struggle with this insidious injustice.

But the flip side of this is the liberty to transform ourselves into who we've always wanted to be in the first place—with nothing to lose. And this new enterprise begins with a hearty, red-blooded determination to realign our lives with all that fortifies us as we assert who we want to be at this pivotal time in our lives.

Being a Triumphant Elder can take many shapes. The beauty is that you get to choose your own adventure.

In the columns that follow this edition, I will be presenting ideas that may at first seem a bit unusual. Each month I'll offer something of a blend of cutting edge health information within the context of the ancient, tried and true health practices that have carried the human species to this auspicious if precarious moment.

This can be our finest chapter. The future is waiting to be written by the distilled vintage wisdom of the Triumphant Elder.

In the next edition, watch this space for a column that will present the tantalizing evidence that we can, through ancient but often ignored and quite simple practices, change our brains by ourselves without any kind of medical intervention.

*Tim Keim, EYT500, IAYT Certified Yoga Therapist, Ayurvedic Health Counselor Intern*

## Natural allergy relief

by Robin Thomas

**N**ow that spring is in full swing, and trees and plants are booming all over the place, I'm seeing more and more red swollen allergy eyes, dripping noses and hearing explosive sneezes



ROBIN THOMAS

as I walk around town. Not everyone loves taking over-the-counter or prescription allergy drugs because of their side-effects. Many people I meet here in Chatham are looking for a more natural allergy relief for reducing symptoms, or preventing allergies from happening in the first place. The following natural remedies can help

reduce the severity of symptoms for occasional moderate allergies. Of course, you will want to discuss with your allergist or general practitioner before making any changes in your prescription regimen.

### SIX STEPS FOR NATURAL ALLERGY RELIEF

**1. AVOIDANCE.** One of the most commonly stated ways to reduce allergies is to reduce exposure. In fact, most allergy action plans promoting prevention include avoidance. Not always easy. Yes, if you are allergic to animal dander, you might succeed. But what if tree pollen is your trigger? Or mold? How about grass? You can pay attention to pollen counts, close the windows, and use air filters, but honestly, unless you are a hermit, sometime you do have to go outside.

**2. CLEANLINESS.** Shampooing and showering daily is also a given. When you arrive home, simply washing your hands and face with water will also remove much of the pollen that irritates your nasal passages. But stay away from that hand sanitizer: immunologists are becoming concerned that excessive cleanliness may be one cause of allergies in children. Research shows that there is an inverse relationship between the level of hygiene and the incidence of allergies and autoimmune diseases. The more sterile the environment a child lives in, the higher the risk he or she will develop allergies

or an immune problem in their lifetime. Let your kids play outside in the dirt. It's good for them.

**3. PROBIOTICS.** While cleanliness helps us avoid some harmful allergens and bacteria, it also eliminates the good bacteria. Recent research suggests that supporting our gut microbiome with probiotics reduces allergic rhinitis, allergic eczema and food-related allergies.

**4. FOODS.** Foods rich in antioxidants are quite beneficial for allergy sufferers, as well as the rest of us. Green tea, berries, nuts, pineapple, and legumes are good choices. Avoiding processed foods or foods that increase inflammation is critical. That being said, sometimes any foods can be allergy triggers for a sensitive individual, worsening seasonal allergy symptoms and other health conditions. Again, it is best to talk to your doctor to help determine which foods you should avoid.

**5. SUPPLEMENTS.** During an allergic response our immune system has become our “enemy”. The resulting chronic inflammation depletes our antioxidant defense system, leading to damage to surrounding normal tissue. Scientists have been studying a number of nutrients that have shown to decrease the inflammatory process. Among the most popular are grape seed extract and a flavonoid compound known as quercetin. Quercetin belongs to a group of polyphenolic substances known as flavonoids. It is best to find a source of quercetin that has proven to be bioavailable. Grape Seed Extract, especially when combined with vitamin C, is a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory nutrient with multiple health benefits, including a natural antihistamine effect.

**6. SALINE.** Whether you use a neti-pot or a saline spray, saline helps remove pollen from your nasal passages and also clears and thins the mucus. Using saline also helps keep the cilia in your nostrils.

*Robin Thomas worked in medical research for over 24 years at UNC-Chapel Hill, with the majority of those years studying the role of inflammation in chronic degenerative diseases, and provides healthy tips through “Living Well Connections”. She can be reached at: robinthomas.usana@gmail.com*

## Advance directives and other medical tall tales

by Brenda Denzler

**L**ast night I was reading through my personal journal from 2010 and I found a note about my friend Kate. The issue I was consumed with in those days was how women with metastatic breast cancer were treated. The standard approach was (and still is) to treat them palliatively—in other words, to keep them alive and comfortable for as long as possible, but not to cure them. I wanted more. I wanted to fight for that coveted NED (no evidence of disease, which to me equaled cure), not just palliative treatment. Kate had been diagnosed with mets right out of the starting gate in 2009. She knew that eventually she was going to die from her disease and that all of her treatments were merely time-buying strategies. She didn't see any point in fighting for something so very unlikely as a cure.

What I had forgotten, and was reminded of last night, was that Kate had a plan to take her own life when her disease became so advanced that death was imminent. We had talked about it several times—her stash of pills, her criteria for just when she would do it. She wanted to go out on her own terms. I respected her right to make that decision. In fact, I admired her courage.

One of our IBC sisters in Australia had recently done exactly that. Though her quality of life had become negligible and the pain from the cancer was almost incapacitating, she hung on until her upcoming birthday, planning a big party to celebrate the event. It was, we were told, a real blow-out bash—one for the memory books. Then she went home and, three days later, in the company of her loving partner, quietly swallowed a lethal dose of pills.

Kate didn't die until 2017. It's been almost two years, now. When she did, it was with the skin all over her chest broken open with painfully ulcerating metastases and a tumor on the side of her neck that grew so large it was impossible for her to hold her head straight without a great deal of pain and difficulty. (Cancer is not pretty.) She received increasing amounts of medication for the pain and became, as a result, increasingly foggy and out of it. After a couple of months of this she was, thankfully, set free.

But it was not by her own hand, as she had planned. Somewhere along the way, her plans had changed. The drive to live is strong, after all, even in the face of knowledge that you are actively dying. Or maybe her plans became slowly eroded by one small decision after another until, ultimately, they had become pointless—or impossible to fulfill. I still respect her decision(s).

I think this happens to all of us, all the time.

I had always said, and firmly believed, that if I ever got cancer, I would never resort to chemotherapy, radiation and surgery to deal with it. Like Kate with her pills, I had a stash of alternative medical literature explaining what I could do, instead, and I knew where to go to learn more. Yet when my back was against the wall and I knew I had a very aggressive form of cancer that had been found “early” at Stage IIIB, all my advance planning about what I would do went out the window. I chose differently. It caused me a lot of anguish, mind you—but I chose differently.

Fact is, you often don't know what you want until you're smack in the middle of a situation. You may think you know what you would want or do...but you don't.

In 1978 my husband and I were living in a hovel (quite literally). A couple of blocks away they were building a big, sprawling apartment complex. We marveled at how quickly it was being put up—“thrown up” would be more like it! One day there was nothing but concrete slab everywhere. Twenty-four hours later there was a veritable forest of 2x4 studs and joists reaching two stories into the air. We laughed at the poor, unsuspecting people who would wind up living in that flimsy complex. Turns out, our second son was born at home there about a year later.

Like I said, you never know for sure what you're going to want or need to do until you're actually in the situation.

As a part of trying to manage the conundrum of how to get my oncologists on board with my treatment preferences for metastatic disease, one of my BC sisters with mets encouraged me to make an advance directive on the subject. With her help, I concocted a beautiful, concise statement of my decisions on the matter, with a word or two about my reasons for making those choices. To make it more palatable to my oncologists, I submitted it with two other documents: my first-ever set of Advanced Care Directives (covering what kind of care I wanted at the end of life) and a properly executed Health Care Power of Attorney.

The truth of the matter is, though, that I no longer know. Oh sure. When I thrust those papers into my oncologists' hands, I was pretty darned certain I knew what I wanted. Though experiences during my treatment had made me very uncertain as to whether anything in those three documents would really be honored, I felt I still had to try to make my voice heard.

Today, I'm considerably more ambivalent about what “my voice” is. I know more about the nature of cancer than I did in 2010, and more about cancer treatments. I've seen how what we know about cancer and what we can do about it are changing surprisingly quickly. I've seen a lot of exceptions to the “rules of engagement with cancer” as written by the mainstream medical establishment or by the alternative medicine crowd. I've watched close friends and more distant ones die, and seen how the best-laid plans and loftiest intentions so easily evaporate in the white-hot heat of a medical crisis.

Advanced Directives? Here they are: I want to live and be able to find pleasure in the living. I want to die with some shred of dignity. And in between, I want to be able to change my mind again and again about just what those two things might mean.

*Brenda Denzler was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer in 2009. She became a cancer survivor on the very day she was diagnosed.*