

Pharmacologist's book discusses the science of aging for the rest of us

May 25 2015, by Ellen Goldbaum

You don't need a doctorate in pharmacology to write a book about aging, but these days, when the average senior citizen takes multiple medications, it does come in handy. That's evident in "Optimal Aging: A Guide to Your First Hundred Years," by Jerrold Winter, PhD, a professor in the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology in the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Science.

Published by CreateSpace, a self-publishing company and available through Amazon.com, the book includes plenty of non-pharmacologic information and advice on things like exercise, pain and death. Winter also focuses on providing solid information about "the chemicals in our lives," from over-the-counter medications to prescriptions and [dietary supplements](#).

"Aging is all about science," said Winter. "This is true whether one is speaking of nutrition or exercise or disease or any of the other myriad factors that influence how we age. The fact that I am a professor of [pharmacology](#) and toxicology just means that when it comes to drugs, I don't have to work as hard to understand the science."

According to Kirkus Reviews, "Winter references copious studies and incorporates a good dose of technical material, but his final product is surprisingly readable, conversational and compassionate. He consistently remains an ardent advocate for the individual, whether he's discussing the need for opiates for pain relief or poignantly calling for the right to die with dignity."

Winter admits his own bias against supplements, discussing at one point the "fundamental idiocy" of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act. "The Act permits the virtually unregulated promulgation to the American people of what, in the words of another, are largely fraudulent claims that support a \$30-billion-dollar-a-year industry," he said, noting the recent television advertisements claiming that a [protein supplement](#) can improve brain function. "Any protein we eat, whether it comes from a hot dog or a supplement, is simply digested and in no way can influence specific proteins in our brains," he said. "The ads are nonsense."

He provides an in-depth explanation of the origins of the Food and Drug Administration, and some dramatic lessons from history about the willingness to prescribe drugs even when all the science didn't support it: His recounting of the thalidomide scandal is one example.

The book examines specific components of good nutrition, devoting whole sections to specific vitamins and nutrients, and he spends some time explaining why, contrary to what we've heard, fat and cholesterol are critical to health.

Winter explains the phenomenon that too many senior citizens suffer from: They are prescribed too many medications, many of which are completely unnecessary and end up compromising, not enhancing, their health.

In particular, he singles out the use of antipsychotic drugs for treating anxiety, depression, dementia, hostility and other psychiatric problems in the elderly, demonstrating how they have often done more harm than good. He also lists major drug companies that have each been fined several hundred million dollars for violating laws by prescribing anti-psychotic drugs for off-label uses, and puts those fines in the context of sales figures of the same companies.

There are sections on weight loss, enhancement of performance (athletic, cognitive and sexual) and a final section on "The things we wish to avoid" – including pain, dementia, cancer, heart disease and stroke, and on death and dignity.

Winter says his goal in writing the book is to bring order and genuine understanding to the thousands of bits of information that relate to aging and to strive to attain "total perspective."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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