

Can a 70-year-old have the arteries of a 20-year-old?

May 30 2017, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Imagine having the clear, supple, healthy blood vessels of

a 20-year-old in your 70s. It's possible, but "challenging," a new study suggests.

Still, if you eat right, exercise and stay trim, you have a shot at offsetting age-related blood vessel degeneration, according to this study of more than 3,000 adults.

Genetics played less of a role than lifestyle in keeping blood vessels young, the researchers found.

Over time, blood vessels stiffen and [blood pressure](#) rises, leading to a significant risk for [heart](#) disease and stroke, said Dr. Teemu Niiranen. He is a research fellow at Boston University School of Medicine and the Framingham Heart Study.

"We didn't find any magic bullet that kept people's blood vessels young," he said. "It seems that these are people who just lead a very [healthy lifestyle](#)."

Heart disease is really a lifestyle disease, Niiranen explained. And a lifetime of poor eating habits and sedentary living—hallmarks of Western culture—take their toll, he said.

"When you get over 70, it is hard to maintain a normal vasculature—it's possible, but it's very challenging," Niiranen said.

But in many indigenous hunter-gatherer populations, [high blood pressure](#) is the exception, not the rule, he said. Those groups rely on foraging and hunting to obtain food.

For the study, Niiranen and his colleagues collected data on nearly 3,200 adults aged 50 and older enrolled in the Framingham Heart Study—a long-running project run by the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood

Institute.

Staying lean and not developing diabetes were the keys to keeping blood vessels young, he said.

Low cholesterol levels also contributed to maintaining healthy blood vessels, Niiranen said.

The study looked for an association between healthy vascular aging and adherence to the American Heart Association's "Life's Simple 7" healthy heart goals. People who met six out of seven goals were 10 times more likely to have healthy blood vessels as they aged than those who met none of the goals, the researchers found.

The goals of the heart association's Life's Simple 7 include:

- Keep blood pressure normal,
- Keep cholesterol low,
- Keep blood sugar down,
- Stay active,
- Eat healthy,
- Lose weight,
- Stop smoking.

People who had healthy blood vessels had a 55 percent lower risk of developing [heart disease](#) or stroke, Niiranen said.

Dr. Byron Lee is a professor of medicine and director of electrophysiology laboratories and clinics at the University of California, San Francisco.

"We may not have found the fountain of youth, but we now know what can keep your arteries young," said Lee.

Simple things like eating right, staying active, and managing your blood pressure and cholesterol seem to slow and sometimes even stop the stiffening of arteries once considered inevitable, he said.

"Hopefully, this will spur more people to choose a healthy lifestyle," Lee noted.

Among the study participants, the researchers looked for those with [normal blood pressure](#) and supple blood vessels, measured by so-called pulse-wave velocity. These individuals were defined as having healthy blood vessels.

Overall, just under 18 percent of the participants had healthy [blood vessels](#). Younger participants were most likely to have healthy vessels, the study findings showed.

However, while about 30 percent of those aged 50 to 59 had healthy [blood vessels](#), only 1 percent of those 70 and older did, Niiranen said. And these were most likely to be women.

"It is possible for everyone to maintain a vasculature of a 20-year-old into old age, but it takes a lot of hard work," he said.

The report was published online May 30 in the journal *Hypertension*.

More information: Teemu Niiranen, M.D., research fellow, Boston University School of Medicine, Framingham Heart Study; Byron Lee, M.D., professor of medicine, director, electrophysiology laboratories and clinics, University of California, San Francisco; May 30, 2017, *Hypertension*, online.

For more on Life's Simple 7, visit the [American Heart Association](#).

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