



## In Bounds: Growing Old: Reality or Perception

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Growing up I used to think of age related ailments happening to those who were "old." Recently my body has made me more and more aware of my years here on earth. Dispersed in a shotgun pattern, my eyebrows have grown long, grey hairs so thick it takes a wire cutter to trim them. My ears are no longer finely tuned instruments adept at picking up the sound of grass growing. And my skeleton will sometimes make sounds, eeree, creaking noises, even in the stillness of a winter afternoon nap.

Other issues relevant to entering middle age include concerns of health care insurance, long term health care insurance and long long term health care insurance. In an effort to shape a new and reduced insurance plan, my club elected to go from a co-pay low deductible plan to a no-co-pay, high deductible plan with the option of a health savings account beginning January of 2007. Post 45 years of age placed me in a more expensive category than when I was a lad of 30.

**Am I growing old?** Perhaps. Shortly before Christmas during my annual physical, one I had put off for five years, a pain in my side generated good discussion with Dr. Sanders, a physician who now knows me rather intimately ("two fingers at a time I suggested, because I wanted a second opinion right away") and who advised me to lower my cholesterol. Off to the ultra sound lab I was sent with directions to have a stomach scan done. What the heck, my 25 dollar co-pay was paying the way!

**"Looks like you've got sludge in your gall bladder"** the thorough technician said. "No crystalline stones, but enough stuff in there to cause some minor distress. I'll pass the report onto your doctor for further review." With the news in hand I left for a better day at work, no mention of the "C" word, another ponderous thought when you get older.

Not one to hang out and wait for a prognosis I took the matter into my own hands and once home did research on gall bladders, gall stones, sludge, remedies, cures and prevention via the internet. In fact, my afternoon was consumed with web surfing, a very passive exercise hav-

ing nothing to do with a board or water, yet if practiced long enough will generate a stiff neck and sore shoulder muscles. The amount of information gleaned could have filled volumes, but fortunately the bullet points for good gall bladder health were short and sweet.

**Increase exercise and physical fitness.** Well, here is a coincidence related to old age. Not wanting my "muffin top" waistline to become a "popover", my wife and I had recently purchased a Vision fitness elliptical exercise machine. Besides helping to shed a bit of weight (12 pounds so far), toning a few muscle groups (can you say "speedo at the beach") and increasing my stamina, the daily Sprint 8 followed by ten minutes of cardio is surely lowering my 240 cholesterol count and helping with my sludge issue.

Decrease sugar intake. Who knew that my sweet tooth for chocolate treats, ice cream at night and the club's famous carrot cake impacted my gall bladder? I sure didn't, but now that I do, I am limiting my sugar consumption. This regimen, combined with my new found physical workout, just may facilitate my goal of three pack abs.

**Increase fiber.** Beyond improved internal cleansing and regularity, a diet high in fiber has made me acutely aware of the product "Beano."

**Decrease fats.** Doesn't everything taste better with butter? I, one of the original butter hog fan club members, have always thought so. Melted, clarified or soft spread, butter used to grace my vegetables, breads, seafood and even peanut butter sandwiches. Today my family goes without the smooth texture and slightly salty taste of sweet cream butter and instead we use Paul Harvey's substitute, Smart Spread. With the exception of not melting very well on cauliflower and broccoli, the artificial butter isn't all that bad.

**Increase flax meal.** Some studies have found a lower risk for gallstones in people who consumed foods containing monounsaturated fats (found in olive and canola oils) or omega-3 fatty acids (found in canola, flaxseed, and, particularly, fish oil). For breakfast I have a quick hot cereal comprised of two tablespoons of oatmeal

and two tablespoons of milled flax seed accompanied with a small handful of raisins. Fast, simple and it really gets me going if you know what I mean!

**Increase in Vitamin C.** Ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) appears to help break cholesterol down in bile. Vitamin C deficiencies have been associated with a higher risk for gallstones. Hmm, how long I wonder until I have one of those 16-inch plastic pill boxes to hold my vitamin C's, glucosamine and chondroitin tablets, multi tabs, allergy med, beano and antacid complete with alarm wristwatch and times to take the drugs?

Since hitting my new regimen hard I no longer feel the ache in my side. A natural cure or just psychosomatic? Does it really matter?

Yesterday the doctor's office called. An invitation to visit a specialist has been offered up to review my ultrasound report. Apparently I am a candidate for gall bladder removal due to the sludge build-up. But today I feel GREAT, and am not experiencing any issues. And the drawback of having my gall bladder removed, according to the RN, is a low tolerance to deep fried foods which could lead to bouts of diarrhea. Not a good thing in my book, especially if on occasion I may want to blow my "program" completely and pig put on a fried shrimp dipped in melted butter dinner including fresh popovers, baked potatoes and sour cream or an infrequent visit to KFC for their original recipe.

**But here is the real kicker, besides feeling too good for surgery;** I am a cheap son of a bitch. The frugal side of me doesn't want to cough up the dough for elective surgery much less pay for the consultation. Since the club's insurance plan has changed, I am on the hook for the first \$5,250 bucks of medical expenses. Sure contributions are being made to a health savings account, but there isn't more than a handful of dimes in there today.

**What's an old guy like me to do?** I think for now I will take a wait and see attitude. My body feels good. And I want to keep myself whole as long as possible. Am I at risk for a gall bladder attack? Maybe, but by then I will have some coin in my Health Savings Account and can afford a bit of surgery.

In fact, I think I will save up all sorts of elective surgeries besides gall bladder removal such as knee replacement, hip reconstruction, shoulder renovation and skin renewal and get them done all at one time. Discounting some expenses and rejuvenating my body all at the same time seems like the prudent thing to do. - JM