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## PROFILE

**A Prescription for Health**

Diet, supplements and a positive attitude—singing and whistling included

Getting older hasn't made much difference in Vito Florio's energy level, his health or outlook—but it has made one huge change in his life. He now has the opportunity to focus on issues that he couldn't always address when he was putting in long hours working production on a garment line and raising three children with his wife, Elaine. What's different is that today, at age 72, Florio has the time to reach out to people who need his help.

"It only takes one person to make a difference, because that one person makes ripples like a pebble being thrown in a lake," says the semi-retired Floridian. "I always try to help. If people with a lot of knowledge in one area would go out of their way to offer that knowledge to the people who need their help, it would be a different world."

Florio is trying to do his part by tapping a late-blooming entrepreneurial spirit that helped him develop a natural pain reliever and later sent him into the foothills of the Peruvian Andes in search of local remedies for a wide variety of ailments. (When Indians there emptied a satchel of roots and seeds onto the table, he said he was more excited by the prospect of creating new treatments than if they'd been unloading rubies and emeralds.) His great delight nowadays is helping people feel better—whether it be a Peruvian taxicab driver who suffers from tendinitis or a young man whose chronic hip ailment prevents him from walking straight—he's ready to offer advice, money or share his insight. Proceeds from Florio's current work with a Florida-based company that specializes in South American herbs and botanicals will help fund an orphanage in Lima, Peru.



Of course, none of this would be possible if Florio didn't feel so good himself. The New York-born grandfather of four shuns a formal exercise routine—his workouts consist mainly of chasing down basketballs while 16-year-old grandson, Kenny, practices free throws—but still manages to stay fit. Working on the new home that he and Elaine are building outside Fort Lauderdale keeps him active, as does caring for a frail, elderly uncle. He also enjoys taking walks around the neighborhood. And there are so many family members living nearby that Florio is never at a loss for company. Indeed, he and Elaine make breakfast for two of their grandchildren every morning before driving the two to school. Florio's days are so full that he tries to keep his sleep time to just five or six hours a night.

A strict supplement/vitamin regime certainly helps keep him youthful and healthy. Both Florio and his wife use Life Extension Mix everyday to promote overall good health, as well as Super CoQ10 for cardiovascular fitness and ginkgo biloba for brain enhancement. Green tea is likewise a daily essential as a potent antioxidant and Essiac tea is used to help prevent cancer, specifically as a tumor-fighting agent. The couple turns to the Peruvian herb cat's claw for its anti-inflammatory properties and for help in keeping the digestive system functioning smoothly. Another supplement from the wilds of South America, maca, helps the Florios maintain high energy levels and ensure that their hormone systems stay fine-tuned. The final element in their regime is Florio's very own creation, a combination of Chondrox, Mega GLA and Mega EPA that provides relief from chronic inflammation and pain by thinning the blood and allowing it to flow freely into capillaries.

"I actually feel a little guilty that when I get up in the morning I have no symptoms," says Florio. "I jump out of bed as though I were 20 years old."

Florio believes that the key to good health and longevity lies in the stomach—with supplements and vitamins being one cornerstone and proper diet the other. "Everything begins in your digestive system," he says. "If yours [works properly], you're going to be free and clear of 80 percent of the [more severe] diseases out there. The trouble is that most people don't put the right things into their bodies."

Florio finds this especially true of Americans, who tend to be fall victim to bad eating habits stoked by supermarket aisles laden

with potato chips, soft drinks and sweets. He personally eschews heavy meals and processed foods, sticking mostly to fresh fruits and vegetables and brought up his children and grandchildren to value the same healthy habits. "As Americans, we must change our eating habits," he says. "We are slowly destroying our bodies." This point was underscored on his trip to Peru where he visited extremely poor people, living in the Andean mountainside, who were nevertheless getting all the nutrients they needed-and no one was overweight.

Florio is especially keen on getting enough essential fatty acids into his system-such as flaxseed oil noting that the human brain is 50 to 60 percent composed of such acids and depends upon their continual replenishment for proper functioning. Essential fatty acids also keep arthritis in check as shown by studies on Eskimos and their diet of deep-sea fish. Avoiding the "bad" hydrogenated oils, the type used to make fast-food hamburgers and french fries, is a must for Florio, given that these oils create debris in the system that then clogs arteries and veins.

Still, diet and supplements can only get you so far-the rest of the journey depends on the right attitude, something that Florio learned early on from his father, Pasquale. Pasquale opened his own ice and coal business in the 1920s, in which he worked six and half days a week. His personal life was just as tough. A twin boy and girl died of infections before reaching six-months and Pasquale's wife died of cardiovascular disease at age 39. (Vito was only eight.) Then the depression hit the Florio household hard. Yet Florio senior was never depressed, a fact that he attributed to his habit of humming, singing and whistling. As a young boy, Vito developed the same outlook using the same technique and to this day sings along with old show tunes (Elaine is the whistler in the family). Vito believes his father's approach could some day replace St. John's Wort as a natural anti-depressant.

"I never get depressed and I never get headaches," he says. "It all depends on how you look at something and I try to look on the good side of things-I'm a real glass-is-half-full kind of guy."

His positive attitude has surely been tested. Vito first arrived in Florida in 1974, with dreams of joining a friend's condo maintenance business, but saw his dream evaporate during the recession when new construction came to a standstill. Instead, he and a partner opened a lawn-service business, which floundered and was later disbanded. Vito went bankrupt. He then moved his family back to New York where he owned and managed nine apartment buildings in Brooklyn. But, under rent control, the neighborhood began to decline and Vito lost most of his investment. Undeterred, he went back into garment production and remade his life. Eventually, the Florios decided to give Florida another try. "A lot of people go through life afraid to take a chance," he says. "But I'm not one of those. I've always had so much confidence in myself that I never thought I could fail." That confidence came in handy in 1994 when Vito sustained a groin injury for which his physician prescribed anti-inflammatory drugs. The treatment gave him such severe gastric irritation that he stopped taking the medication and was informed that his only hope for pain relief was a hip replacement. "I refused," he remembers. "I preferred to rely on my faith, common sense and motivation not to have that hip operation."

Instead, Vito hit the research library, reading everything he could find about pain and arthritis treatments. That's when he developed his own pain reliever-and began sharing it with others. He has since sold the patent, but became involved with the herbal/ botanical company shortly thereafter.

"I still can't seem to retire," he says. "'Why?' Because I see that people in the U.S. and the rest of the world still have all kinds of health problems and I believe my help is needed."

-Twig Mowatt

[Back to the Magazine Forum](#)

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