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PROFILE

The Dawning of a New Era
One Marathon Runner's Quest to Prevent Disease

At age 51, Jonathan Rosen is strongly committed to fighting the aging process in more ways than one. An avid exerciser who leads a balanced lifestyle, follows a healthy diet and frequently updates his supplement regime, Rosen believes disease prevention is serious business



"I think it's the dawning of a new era," he said recently on the phone from his home on Manhattan's Upper West Side. "People are finally waking up to the fact that you can be in charge of your own health, and that you don't automatically have to get old and die or accept heart disease and cancer as a fact of life."

Rosen didn't always have this perspective. As a teenager growing up in Union, New Jersey he was decidedly "anti-exercise," with a real weakness for junk food. He was also unhappy. In 1971, a serendipitous glance at a magazine on health and alternative treatments, combined with the untimely deaths of his aunt from breast cancer, his uncle from coronary disease, and his grandfather from lung cancer, made him begin to question his lifestyle-and made him rail at the destruction of disease. He started to focus some of his natural rebelliousness on the medical establishment, which he blamed for being narrowly focused and dismissive. "I realized how the medical establishment was brainwashing people and that there was no reason to be sick in the first place," he says. Rosen tapped into this sense of rage in the early 1980s during his own bout with illness-a mild bout of periodontal disease similar to the major gum diseases endured by both his mother and sister. He also experienced a general decline in his energy level. Someone at the Life Extension Foundation told him to try Coenzyme Q10 to help with general health (he was flossing and brushing at the time to treat his periodontal disease, but coincidentally COQ10 is one of the treatments outlined in Life Extension's Disease Prevention and Treatment expanded third edition to treat the disease.) "After awhile my energy picked up," Rosen remembers. "And eventually there was no sign of periodontal disease."

At about the same time that Rosen was discovering the benefits of nutrients he was also learning to appreciate exercise. As a volunteer for the program Synanon, a former treatment center for recovering drug addicts, he began participating with program residents in a mandatory aerobics class and soon noticed that he himself was feeling a lot better. That was in 1974 and since then-except for time off for injuries-he hasn't missed his regular weekly workouts. "If I miss a scheduled day now, it throws my whole body off," he reports. When a tense, mildly spasmodic muscle in his foot cooled his enthusiasm for high-impact sports (he ran the New York City Marathon in 1997) he took almost exclusively to the pool. Nowadays he can be found regularly at the local YMCA holding onto the side of the pool and kicking hard for at least a full 45 minutes four times a week.

As major breakthroughs in aging began to appear on the scene, Rosen further focused his vitamin/supplement regime on slowing aging and preventing the diseases associated with it. He added iron and DHEA, and later included saw palmetto, which he takes

every day for prostate health. Rosen also takes three forms of vitamin E to ensure that he's getting enough gamma tocopherol to unleash the full benefit of the vitamin's ability to send oxygen to the heart and unclog arteries. Other vitamins on his list include plenty of C, B12, beta-carotene, folic acid, inositol and paba capsules. Daily doses of perilla oil and lecithin help with skin tone. "I noticed a difference right away," says Rosen. "My skin texture improved and became shinier."

Rosen alternates days on the amino acid l-carnitine and takes taurine everyday, both of which are important for top brain and heart function, especially in preventing cardiomyopathy. While ginkgo capsules work to keep his brain functioning sharply, bilberry extract is on Rosen's list as a way to maintain good vision. For its many benefits, Rosen has recently added CLA to his regime.

As for herbs, Rosen uses Sports Ginseng every other day to stay in top physical form and relies on two different types of horse chestnut to fight varicose veins and improve circulation in general. TMG tablets reduce his chance of cardiovascular disease, as does a baby aspirin a day, which he also credits with helping to slow aging. Mega Soy is an important element in his list of weapons against cancer, and minerals are daily musts. Super Selenium helps protect Rosen from free radical damage and he turns to one or two daily capsules of bromelain, the natural enzyme found in pineapple, as an aid in digestion. "It works wonders for me," he notes.

These are just some of the highlights of a list that has expanded greatly since Rosen began compiling it in 1982. "I feel great," he reports. "I have a tremendous amount of energy. The only time I feel tired is if I haven't had enough sleep-sometimes I don't get enough sleep because there's so much to do. I feel like a teenager."

Diet, of course, plays an important role in Rosen's health regimen, though he admits he's "not perfect." He favors small meals throughout the day, as a way to keep both his energy up and his weight down. Yogurt sweetened with natural fruit juices, popcorn and power bars are menu stalwarts. He also likes organic cereals (occasionally allowing himself a sugar-coated one) and organic collard greens. White matzo is an all-time favorite, especially smothered in ketchup, which Rosen says is good for the prostate because of its high content of the natural carotenoid, lycopene. A grapefruit right before bed helps burn fat and keep his weight down, as do three green tea capsules throughout the day. He also drinks around 12, 12-ounce glasses of water a day.

What Rosen doesn't eat is meat, not only because he believes it isn't good for him but also because he doesn't think farm animals are humanely treated. He also limits refined sugar-except for the occasional sweets, and he limits his caffeine consumption to every other day.

When Rosen isn't at work as a postal clerk, he's likely to be found frequenting bookstores on the Upper West Side. He also enjoys going to museums, playing chess, and collecting stamps, and likes to party with friends at New York City's many nightclubs, but always "without abusing" his body.

A recent challenge for this natural health zealot has been helping one of his postal colleagues learn to take better care of herself. This lady, a long-time smoker, has started using flaxseed oil and CoQ10, among other things, at Rosen's suggestion, and has taken up running. She's also listening to his advice about cutting down on refined foods and has begun losing weight. But, Rosen sees his friend as a refreshing exception. "I'm up against a lot of ignorance," he says. "People are very close minded about health-but to me it's the most natural thing in the world. I don't choose to get cancer and heart disease-and I'm not going to."

-Twig Mowatt

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