

When it comes to aging well, most people think about **lifespan**—the total number of years we live. But a more meaningful goal might be extending our *healthspan*, the years we spend in good health and independence. Understanding the difference between these two concepts and focusing on your healthspan can help you ask the right questions during your next clinician visit.

Understanding Healthspan vs. Lifespan

Lifespan is simply how long you live. In contrast, **healthspan** refers to the period of your life when you are healthy, free from chronic illness or disability, and able to perform daily activities comfortably. Ideally, your healthspan would match your lifespan, meaning you live a long life without years of poor health. But research shows a widening gap between lifespan and healthspan, with many people living longer but spending more years with chronic diseases.

For example, Medical Daily (Medicaldaily.com) reports that while life expectancy has increased steadily over the last century, the burden of chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes means many spend a significant portion of their lifespan managing illness instead of thriving.

The Healthspan-Lifespan Gap: Why It Matters

The *healthspan-lifespan gap* refers to the years lived in poor health after chronic diseases develop. The longer this gap, the more your quality of life can suffer. Conditions like **heart disease** and **type 2 diabetes** often arise in middle age and contribute to disability, reduced mobility, and increased healthcare costs.

Because of this, shifting medical priorities from simply prolonging life to actively improving functional health is becoming critical. Functional health goals focus on maintaining strength, mobility, cognition, and independence—key aspects that define your healthspan.

Why You Should Talk to Your Clinician About Functional Health Goals

Your clinician can help you set personalized **functional health goals** and develop a plan to achieve them. This means more than just monitoring blood pressure or cholesterol; it involves screening for risk factors, detecting early signs of chronic disease, and emphasizing lifestyle changes that support long-term vitality.

Here are some key questions you should consider asking your clinician to get the most out of your visit:

1. **What screenings should I prioritize to monitor my risk of chronic diseases?** Early detection is critical. For example, screening for prediabetes or early heart disease can open doors to interventions that extend your healthspan.
2. **Which risk factors in my family or personal history should I focus on reducing?** Understanding genetics, lifestyle habits, and environmental exposures helps tailor prevention efforts.
3. **How can I set realistic functional health goals for my age and current condition?**



This helps you aim for maintaining mobility, cognitive function, and independence, rather than just normal lab values.

4. **What lifestyle changes will have the most impact on extending my healthspan?** From nutrition to exercise and stress management, your clinician can help prioritize what works best for you.
5. **Are there emerging tools or resources I can use for better tracking and motivation?** Clinicians may recommend apps or programs like the *My Legacy Podcast*, which focuses on personalized healthspan strategies.

Chronic Diseases Impacting Healthspan: Focus on Heart Disease and Diabetes

Heart disease remains the leading cause of disability and death worldwide, heavily impacting healthspan. High blood pressure, poor diet, and inactivity increase this risk. Diabetes, especially type 2, is another major healthspan barrier, accelerating aging complications like nerve damage and kidney disease.

Medical professionals now view these diseases through a healthspan lens. Managing them proactively through early screening and focused risk reduction means you spend fewer years coping with disability.

Marc Kielburger: A Leader in Purpose-Driven Health and Well-Being

You might wonder why a social entrepreneur is relevant in a health discussion. Marc Kielburger, co-founder of the global organization Free The Children and the newer Legacy+ platform, is an expert at weaving purpose, community engagement, and health together.

Legacy+ focuses on holistic health practices and intergenerational impact, promoting the idea that your purpose and social connections can influence your [JAMA Network Open study](#) healthspan positively. While purpose alone doesn't guarantee longevity, as critics remind us, Kielburger's work brings credibility and balance to healthspan conversations by integrating lifestyle, social well-being, and chronic disease prevention.



How to Use Resources Like My Legacy Podcast and Social Media to Stay Informed

Staying engaged in your health journey can be easier with trustworthy resources. The **My Legacy Podcast** regularly features experts discussing functional health goals, cutting-edge screening methods, and real-life patient stories to inspire actionable steps.

Additionally, leveraging tools like Twitter share links helps you connect with communities and share your health journey with others, promoting accountability and support.

Summary: What This Means for You

Understanding the difference between lifespan and healthspan transforms the way you approach your health. Instead of focusing solely on adding years to life, aim to add life to your years by setting functional health goals and asking your clinician the right questions about screenings and risk factors.

- Prioritize early screenings for heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions.
- Work with your clinician to identify personal risk factors and realistic functional goals.
- Incorporate lifestyle changes that support long-term independence and vitality.
- Use modern tools like the *My Legacy Podcast* and social media for education and motivation.
- Remember that your sense of purpose and social connections also matter—just don't let claims of guaranteed longevity fool you.

For more insights, visit [Medicaldaily.com](https://www.Medicaldaily.com) and explore initiatives like Legacy+ and Free The Children. Taking control of your healthspan starts with informed conversations—be ready when you see your clinician next!