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We don't talk,
we do

Or what are we waiting for?

Act1
just be.

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“Insanity Is Doing the
Same Thing Over and
Over Again and Expecting
Different Results”

- Albert Einstein

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Dr. Dagmar Grieshofer & Prof. Dr. Peter Grieshofer

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Preface

How do we imagine getting older?

This is a question that is never – or rarely – asked in adolescence or as young adults. Indeed, such contemplations only really begin when our parents or grandparents start to need support or care. And that's when, mostly in the family circle, various possibilities around life in old age are discussed, such as the move to a senior citizens home or an old people's care facility.

My wife and I are both doctors with decades of professional experience, and we have already passed the age of 60. Our personal conviction is that it is, to a large extent, our personal responsibility to manage our health as we get older. Of course, there are issues of fate and illness which are beyond anyone's control, but to maintain independence, we must take ownership of our health and well-being. This is our goal, and we would like to share it with you, because we believe that care facilities are the least desirable option as we get older.

Even before the pandemic turned our lives upside down, we were intensively exploring the topic of how and under what conditions we could grow older more healthily, with high levels

of satisfaction and well-being, and how we could extend our healthy lifespan. With the results of these explorations, we created the 55+ Formula. Together with expert partner we researched and developed what we need to live a healthy life today and in the future.

We are aware that there are already many different models for healthy living. And so we strive to identify the best options according to medical and scientific criteria. Our common goal is to live in such a way that no nursing measures will be required as we move into old age.

After all, almost every day you hear on the media or from our politicians that we are facing a nursing crisis.

A crisis, which is increasingly becoming a decisive question in our aging society, that is caused by, among other things, the fact that we are becoming too sick too young, and becoming dependent on care.

What is today's world like today when you get older?

Your pension is just around the corner, your children have moved out of the house, and maybe you already have grandchildren. Or perhaps you live in a one-person household for any of a variety of reasons. Even if you're not there yet, the thoughts and doubts will come sooner or later. How will I live off my pension? What will my aging look like? And, especially, where will I spend it?

The classic structures of the multi-family household have dissolved to a large extent. Children have scattered all over the world, and although we can all keep in contact via WhatsApp, Zoom or Skype, if in person contact happens at all, it's on holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost or birthdays. Or if you are ill. Another necessity of family life, however, lies in the topic of childcare.

Microcensus data from Germany shows that it is becoming increasingly rare for several generations to live under one roof. More than a quarter of all households (28.1 percent) consist of several generations living together and operating a common household budget. The middle generation predominantly lives with unmarried children (26.9 percent). Households rarely consist of middle and older generations (0.7 percent). And only 0.5 percent of households have three or more generations together. Indeed this form of living together is disappearing rapidly: between 1995 and 2015, the number of households with three or more generations has decreased by 40.5 percent from 351,000 to 209,000.

A dear friend once told me, “You know, the biggest family gatherings are usually funerals...”

Outside these structures, socializing generally consists of our partners, friends, former work colleagues, and this is increasingly contributing to a broader sense of loneliness.

Everything decreases and become rarer over time. On the one hand, frequent contact after retirement from working life is mainly from former colleagues. But many things are promised, and little is kept. Friends move away, or you become less mobile and active. Visiting friends becomes more difficult.

In some cases associations take the place of friendship groups. Volunteer community fire brigades, singing or gardening clubs, and of course clubs like Rotarians, Lions, Zontas, Soroptimists and many others, provide importance social connections as we age. The social, spiritual network of faith communities can also be an essential source of connection. But nevertheless, much of this depends on mobility and accessibility. Virtual tools can never truly replace, real, analogue human contact.

The fact is that work and employment are essential factors for health protection. And a study undertaken by the European Commission proves that issues such as retirement age and pension are deeply connected to the quality of life in Western countries.

To some extent this is a socio-political issues, and as we are not politicians it is not for us to comment. But as doctors who also happen to be part of the 55+ generation, it is of course of great interest to us. A study from the USA shows that those who retire at 66 instead of 65 have an eleven percent lower risk of death. However, this only applied to pensioners who described themselves as healthy.

“It may not affect everyone, but we think that in this context, it is important to stress the role of the social partners in the prolonging of life in the European Union,” writes study leader Chenkai Wu in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 2012.

For their long-term study, data from 12,000 Americans was used. He looked for just 3,000 persons from this cohort whose health data were available from 1992 to the end of the study in 2010, and who had retired at either 65 or 66. Next, the researchers divided the individuals into two groups: About a third of pensioners had reported that illness had been a reason for retirement. Two-thirds, however, stated that they were only for reasons of age and not health. About twice as many of the sick pensioners died during the study, than the the healthy pensioners.

Before we get into the individual chapters of our book, let’s dive into human biology – and also into life expectancy during past times.

“Our bodies,” says biostatistician Jay Olshansky of the University of Chicago’s School of Public Health, “have evolved in such a way that we can have children and raise them. It is true that people have managed to delay aging further and further and have increased life expectancy considerably. But this trend now seems to have slowed down, even if individuals are still getting older.”

Biologically, according to Olshansky, the human body is designed for short-term use: “What we’re doing is pushing these

bodies beyond the end of the warranty period for living machines. Therefore, if we survive into old age, problems set in – just as with cars and racing cars. If we cannot change the structure of our bodies themselves or the process in which old age happens, many things will no longer work as we expand the boundaries of human life.”

How was it for the Romans?

The average life expectancy of the ancient Romans was between 20 and 30 years, taking into account extremely high infant mortality in the first year of life. Only About 25 percent lived to be over 40, and about 5 percent were older than 60 years.

In the Middle Ages, the average life expectancy was between 35 and 40 years, today we can justifiably speak about a doubling of life expectancy. In order to achieve this, on the one hand there are the massively changed living conditions, medical progress, and also personal lifestyle which are all decisive. However, the basic biological determination has not changed – and this should not be forgotten. For this reason, it is important for our 55+ generation to demonstrate, in the context of this book, the possibilities for not only reaching old age, but also enjoying it to a high degree of health and with a high personal sense of well-being.

In order to increase healthy life expectancy and to delay the negative effects of old age, various measures are required, which we will describe in this book. Some of the topics we will cover, have also been covered in parts from our previous book.

What we describe in this book are not visions of the near or distant future, but things that already known and being done today.

We don't talk, we learn. It's never too late.

Genetics, heredity – the most overestimated part of health

Each of us knows the phrase: “My grandpa became ancient, my grandma did too, and so will I.” Unfortunately, or fortunately, genetics, i.e. heredity, is only a very small part of our life expectancy, and also of healthy life expectancy.

As part of an evaluation of 400 million data points, it can be shown that the share of genetics, i.e. heredity, only contributes a modest seven percent to a healthy life. The result of the study, which was conducted by Galico Life Science and published in the renowned journal, Genetic Society of America (Graham Ruby 2018), was surprising, because science previously believed the influence of genetics to be more like 15-30 percent.

It is also important to speak out on the issue of gender, because women and men need similar, but not always the same, thing to be healthy and active at 55+.

The Woman – The Man

There are approximately 6,500 genes that distinguish women from men, and not just the well-known XY and XX chromosomes. This is a difference that has consequences. It is clear and surprising that medicine, and also preventive measures, make a difference between women and men. My wife is a doctor and disease specialist and will explain this in more detail in chapter “The Woman – The Man”.

Neither of us have always been the picture of a healthy lifestyle, especially a healthy life expectancy. However, if you only start thinking about the future when you are no longer 55+, you have to change something.

We don't talk, we do it – what are we waiting for?

As I wrote in my first book about active ageing and lifestyle, it's never too late to make a change. Whether losing weight, eating healthier, finding balance in everyday life or doing more sport, it's something many of us are always talking about doing, whether we talk about it with our partner, with family, with friends. But often the best of these intentions fail.

We don't talk, we do. Not too much at once. Always set small goals.

Who doesn't know it? We want to change our lifestyle, go to the gym, go jogging, walking, eat better, go on diets and much more. Preferably everything at the same time – and the result? Usually, we failed because we wanted too much.

Don't overwhelm yourself with several big resolutions or set your goals too high. It is better to set small goals. Because manageable and achievable intermediate goals lead to moments of happiness and help you to continue to successfully get better. Through the small goals and the recurring experiences of happiness and success, motivation grows. This makes it easier to achieve the big goal.

Due to the small successes, it is easier to increase and further develop your own performance.

It is also important to be clear about what you want and to believe in your goals. Keeping a diary of the development of your plans and goals makes it easier.

Rewards are necessary

Small rewards in between goals increase motivation and happiness and help to further increase discipline and performance. Rewarding should not be directly related to your goals. If you find yourself getting fitter, or weighing a few kilos less, why not treat yourself to a restaurant visit? Simply doing something good for yourself is crucial.

We also know from our own experience that being with others is important for wellbeing. Whether that's things which bring comfort such as sitting on the couch in pairs or a card evening with friends, or things that challenge us like walking or jogging in groups, a round of golf or much more are all activities that bring benefits, whether big or small.

We humans are communicative beings and not primarily built for being alone. Therefore, many necessary things can be done and maintained more easily in groups.

Much is easier in a group

The 55+ formula of Act1 is the perfect platform for this, and we write about it a lot.

Let's start with an example – Sport: This is so much fun when enjoyed in a group, but how boring is it when we're alone? And it's not only sport, but also learning, hobbies and much more are much more enjoyable when integrated into our social structures.

Making regular appointments that oblige you to go and be social, either in person or online are crucial. Times have changed, and the 55+ generation is now one of the most important users of Facebook and other social networks. Even if you don't really feel like it, this commitment makes it harder to give up. Having fun and keeping social are sufficient motivation to participate in the group and, in the long term, to achieve your goals.

Setbacks, failures, motivation lows are normal

Failures happen in every project. But you shouldn't let that get you down. Failures or lesser successes can be a part of everyday life. That's why your community is also important – to meet regularly or at least to exchange ideas online.

We don't talk, we just start. What should we wait for?

It's best to start implementing your goals right away. Because the longer we postpone the implementation of an idea, the lower its importance seems to us. After just a few days, our brain, our subconscious, tells us that the project is no longer important.

The first few weeks are easy, but then...

Subsequently, it is important to grit your teeth, especially in the first few weeks, because after about 21 days, a habitual effect occurs. Then it is particularly important to stay motivated, because plateaus can develop for many goals.

Not all at once

It is never too late to change, to learn, to do something to maintain or improve your well-being and your health. But everything doesn't happen at once. Let's remember our school days. I don't always have the best memories – unlike my wife. We may have been able to learn everything at once as teenagers, but a little later this is only possible if you learn things one after the other.

