



The Palm Beach Post | Thursday, May 16, 2019

HEALTH

PALM BEACH
SENIOR
LIVING
GUIDE

DON'T LET AGE LIMIT YOU

Follow this senior bodybuilder's
approach to life and fitness

See page 14.

DON'T make AGE your CAGE

Learn why aging – and getting ‘old’ – are two different things

By Raphael Calzadilla
Special to The Palm Beach Post

“Most people work at dying. I work at living. It’s a pain in the ass. You have to eat right and exercise. Most people, when they reach a certain age, let down and talk about what they used to do. Well, who gives a damn about what you used to do? It’s what you’re doing now.”

— Jack LaLanne

You can bet fitness guru Jack LaLanne, who lived to the ripe old age of 96 and was still working out up until the day he died, never thought of age as a limitation.

Do you ever think to yourself, “Now that I’m such-and-such age, I’m bound to gain weight, lose flexibility and become more sedentary?”

Well, it doesn’t have to be that way.

I remember the first time someone addressed me as “sir.” I was in my mid-20s, and hearing the word sir felt like a slap in the face. Was I just called an old man? Is my dad standing behind me, and



Raphael Calzadilla (at age 61) works out with resistance bands.
PHOTOS PROVIDED

is the person addressing him? Ugh – I can’t even imagine what a woman must feel when she’s addressed as “ma’am” for the first time.

I remember going home after the “sir” slap and looking in the mirror. I was trying to see how I appear to other people. I still didn’t know, but I had that surreal feeling when you realize you’re getting older.

Despite that, I’ve never said, “I’m getting old.” It’s not that I’m in denial

and don’t have moments like everyone else does. It’s just that I don’t want to be one of those people who always talks about how old they feel, how they can’t do most of what they used to do, how they have this pain and that pain. I refuse to be that person.

Defining ‘age’

The question is: How do you define your age?

For me, the answer started in my



head. Just not thinking old and doing things that make me happy.

My wife, Pam, always tells me that I can't expect people to be like me because I'm a freak. As a 61-year-old natural competitive bodybuilder who still defeats much younger men, I agree with her, but I also know we sell ourselves short with this "I'm getting old" stuff. Look, I know I'm going to die someday, but why should I act dead while I'm alive?

In addition to my bodybuilding, I'm also a personal trainer and fitness writer based in West Palm Beach. What got me motivated to write about aging were all the comments I was hearing and seeing online from people complaining about their age. I started researching to find out how one's mindset influences us as we age.

One of the most interesting studies I found was from Yale University by Dr. Becca Levy. Levy, a psychologist, used a simple yet ingenious method to examine the memories of 90 older adults who were in good health. Participants were asked to recall certain memories and were given a walking test.

Next, words were flashed in front of each study participant at a fast rate, too quickly to read consciously. Positive words about aging – such as "guidance," "wise," "alert," "sage" and "learned" – were flashed. When tested again, researchers found an actual improvement in memory recall, and individuals even walked faster.

Levy then flashed negative words such as "dementia," "decline," "senile," "confused" and "decrepit." This time, memory recall declined and walking paces slowed.

So you can see: Thoughts contribute to one's physical condition. Think like an old person, you'll be an old person.

Loved to dance at 20 and now you're 90, but you know that dance floor is calling your name? Then you'll be dancing.

Time to deprogram misguided beliefs

My disgust with perceptions of aging has to do with how we're programmed to believe we have to look and feel a specific way at a certain age. We get older, and internal changes do take place. But it can happen much later in life and at a slower rate than we're taught to believe. And the reality is that following a healthy lifestyle will help to slow the aging process.

At my last physical, my doctor told me that I'm defying everything he's learned in medical school about what a man is supposed to experience in his 60s. Based on what the world thinks about age, I'm not supposed to be a competitive bodybuilder.

I'm not saying that you have to be in the gym seven days a week or be an extreme athlete. Most people can't relate to that. It's more about a state of mind. It's about accepting your age and redefining it, and not being ashamed of it as I was when I was first called "sir."

People are living longer than ever. Start changing your mindset by taking one powerful action today. Think about one thing you've been wanting to do but felt age was holding you back.

Then write down the first thing you're going to do to achieve it. For me, it was pinpointing my first bodybuilding show when I was in my early 40s. It was something I always wanted to do. It will be something different for you. But write it down because that's the first step to doing it.

It's time to redefine your age – otherwise it will become your cage.

Raphael Calzadilla is a personal trainer, wellness/fitness coach and public speaker. You can read more about him by visiting fitbyraphael.com and contact him via e-mail at raphael@fitbyraphael.com.

Photos, from top: Raphael Calzadilla (at age 60) doing a kettlebell workout; Raphael Calzadilla (at age 59) at a bodybuilding competition; Raphael Calzadilla (at age 61) doing bench presses.