



LONG may we LIVE

While tech billionaires chase immortality, most of us just want to buy some extra years. *Tiffany Darke* dives into the “life extension” market

ILLUSTRATION BY CELINA PEREIRA

The chutzpah of Silicon Valley’s elite is rarely in doubt, but the conceit of their most recent ambition is especially controversial. Nothing less than that holy grail of alchemy is being sought: immortality. The thought of Messrs Thiel and Bezos living forever might send many of us

running for early retirement. But while tech billionaires explore moonshot ideas such as tissue engineering, organ printing, cryonics, digital consciousness and even, chillingly, “young donors”, there are a number of products on the market already making claims to life extension. They may not align with the claims of some extension fanatics that the first person to live to 1,000 is already alive, but instead come closer to Elon Musk’s aspiration to get to a good 100 years.

“Good” is relevant here. For the truth is that while our lifespan might be increasing, our healthspan is actually decreasing. Government health data shows 20 per cent of men’s lives are now spent in poor health, and that figure is increasing. For women it’s even greater – up to 23 per cent. What’s the point in elongating life if you spend that time suffering in poor health?

This relative lack is down to a number of factors, but as Dr Paul Clayton, a clinical pharmacologist and fellow of The Institute of Food, Brain and Behaviour, points out, much can be traced to “nutrition transition”. The phrase was coined by the agricultural economist Barry Popkin in 1994, with a report that correlated a rise in modern degenerative disease with populations that had switched to an ultra-processed diet. Heart disease, cancer and diabetes seem to increase exponentially once people

start eating “modern”. In so-called blue-zone geographies, where populations have an above-average lifespan, a diet of whole foods is a common denominator. That and an active (read: non-screen) lifestyle. “Once you understand the ways modern lifestyle and diet are damaging, you can design precise antidotes,” says Clayton. Specifically, pharmaco-nutritional tools to address what he calls “the four horsemen of the nutritional apocalypse”: chronic inflammatory stress, type B malnutrition, dysbiosis (abnormality of the microbiome) and glycaemic mismatch (large amounts of glucose in the bloodstream). “By neutralising these major causes of disease, you push back the beginnings of heart disease or neurodegeneration by decades, and life expectancy starts to open up,” he says.

One company that’s sprung up with just such a pharmaco-nutritional offering is self-styled “well tech” brand Lyma, with a supplement based on ingredients that it claims are optimally dosed and from peer-reviewed clinical trials. Founder Lucy Goff says: “We’re working with proper science. Ninety per cent of the supplement industry is bunkum – meaningless doses of ingredients, often not in a form that is bioavailable.” Designed

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to bring down the effects of so-called “inflammageing” – or the inflammation of cells caused by stress, bad sleep and modern diet – Lyma requires you to swallow four pills a day, at £150 per month.

“That turmeric you take in your tea in the morning?” says Goff. “Forget it. You need 500mg of active curcuminoids