The Business of Living Longer

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Living longer, ageing more healthily, delaying the onset of disease – the vision of the longevity movement fascinates researchers, investors and health-conscious individuals alike. Yet whilst tech entrepreneurs with billions at stake are banking on biotechnological breakthroughs, experts are calling for a more level-headed approach. Swiss author and financial expert Harry Büsser has spent seven years investigating the longevity hype and has reached a nuanced conclusion. A story between science, billion-dollar investments and the search for the fountain of youth.

The quest for a long life has been with humankind for millennia. Alchemists once sought the philosopher's stone; later, wealthy individuals had themselves cryopreserved after death – in the hope of one day being brought back to life. Worldwide, there are several hundred individuals currently being stored in tanks of liquid nitrogen. However, based on existing scientific knowledge, resuscitation is deemed impossible.

This requires the modern longevity movement to take a much more pragmatic approach. Its goal is not immortality, but the extension of healthy life expectancy. The aim is for people to remain physically fit, mentally alert and free from chronic diseases for as long as possible. The focus is not merely on the number of years lived, but on the quality of those years.

Billion-dollar market with great promise

Hardly any other field of future medicine is currently attracting as much attention as longevity. Prominent technology entrepreneurs such as Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Jeff Bezos and Sam Altman are investing billions in research projects designed to slow down or even reverse the ageing process.

The economic stakes are sky-high. The global longevity market is currently estimated at around 22 billion dollars – and set to almost triple by 2035. The number of companies offering dietary supplements, diagnostic programmes, anti-ageing therapies or biological rejuvenation treatments is growing accordingly.

Harry Büsser, author of the book Longevity – 50 Antworten rund ums längere Leben (Edition Beobachter, 2025), believes this is precisely why caution is called for. The former business and finance journalist views the industry with the same scepticism he uses when analysing financial markets: "So far, the longevity scene has promised a great deal and delivered comparatively little", is his blunt conclusion. Whilst the research is fascinating, he notes, there is often a considerable gap between scientific hope and verifiable results.



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When mice became Methuselahs

Büsser first became aware of the longevity movement through the substance nicotinamide mononucleotide (NMN). It occurs naturally in various fruits and vegetables and is regarded as an important building block of cellular metabolism.

NMN gained international attention partly through the work of Harvard researcher David Sinclair, who, based on animal experiments, pointed to possible life-extending effects. Studies in mice yielded remarkable results.

In humans, however, the findings are considerably less encouraging. In a randomised, placebo-controlled trial involving 66 adults, there was no robust evidence of a clear benefit over the placebo. A pattern that, according to Büsser, is frequently repeated in longevity research: promising results in the laboratory, but so far little substantial evidence in humans.

It's a similar story with rapamycin. The drug has been used successfully for decades in organ transplants because it suppresses the immune system, thus preventing rejection reactions. In animal trials, rapamycin extended the lifespan of older mice by up to 60 percent – a spectacular result.

In humans, however, the use of rapamycin is a sensitive issue due to potential side effects and its immunosuppressive action. There is as yet insufficient evidence to show whether lower or intermittent doses offer any benefit to healthy people. Intensive research is currently underway into rapamycin derivatives designed to retain the potential anti-ageing effect whilst minimising the immunosuppressive side effects. However, these approaches are still at an experimental stage.

The allure of rejuvenation

Methods reminiscent of science fiction are particularly appealing to the media. These include the idea that young blood can rejuvenate older organisms. This concept became widely known through the American entrepreneur Bryan Johnson. By his own accounts, the tech millionaire invests around two million dollars a year in optimising his personal health. A team of doctors monitors his body round the clock, his diet is meticulously planned, and he takes dozens of dietary supplements every day. In 2023, Johnson made headlines worldwide when he arranged for blood transfusions to take place between himself, his son and his father. The idea was based on older studies in mice which had provided evidence of possible rejuvenating effects from youthful blood. However, Johnson's scientific case proved to be weak. Despite this, commercial models based on the concept briefly emerged. The Californian company Ambrosia started offering young blood plasma for several thousand dollars before the US Food and Drug Administration explicitly warned against such services, pointing to a lack of clinical benefit and the potential risks.

What actually works

The deeper Harry Büsser delved into the subject, the clearer it became to him: the most effective ways to achieve a long and healthy life are surprisingly unspectacular.

Regular exercise, a balanced Mediterranean diet, sufficient sleep, social interaction, and avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol consumption are still among the best-evidenced measures. "Essentially, these are the same recommendations that our grandparents were already familiar with," says Büsser. As an example, he cites the Japanese island of Okinawa, which is known for its exceptionally high number of centenarians. The traditional diet is based on vegetables, sweet potatoes, seaweed and herbs. People eat according to the principle of Hara Hachi Bu – stopping when they are around 80 percent full.

The role played by genes is also noteworthy. Contrary to widely held belief, they account for only a small part of our life expectancy. Our lifestyle, habits and social environment have a greater impact.

Between vision and science

Anyone wishing to understand the full scope of the ideas behind the longevity movement cannot ignore Aubrey de Grey. For decades, the British biogerontologist has been regarded as one of its most charismatic proponents. Harry Büsser has held several in-depth conversations with him.

De Grey puts forward the theory that ageing is not an inescapable fate, but a biological defect that can one day be medically remedied. His boldest predictions suggest that the first person to live to over 1,000 years of age may already have been born. For him, old age is a disease – and any disease can, in principle, be cured.

As visionary as these ideas may seem, the scientific advances of recent years cannot be entirely dismissed. Particularly high hopes are riding on stem cell research and so-called cell reprogramming. Among the most high-profile players is Altos Labs, a billionaire-funded biotechnology company backed by, amongst others, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

Altos is researching methods by which ageing cells could be restored to a younger biological state. These methods are based on the so-called Yamanaka factors, named after the Japanese Nobel laureate Shin'ya Yamanaka. They make it possible to revert specialised body cells to a stem cell-like state and then reprogramme them in a targeted manner.

These techniques are still largely experimental, and research is still a long way from large-scale clinical application. Nevertheless, many scientists consider cell reprogramming to be one of the most promising approaches in modern ageing research. Harry Büsser also thinks it entirely conceivable that significant progress will be made over the next ten years. Whether this will actually lead to a path towards biological rejuvenation, however, remains one of the most exciting unanswered questions in medicine.

Who benefits from a long life?

Beyond medical considerations, longevity also raises social and ethical issues. Critics view the multi-billion-dollar investments not so much as a humanistic project as an attempt by a wealthy elite to buy themselves additional healthy years of life. The question is therefore not only whether we can live longer, but also who will have access to these opportunities. What would happen if, in future, people remained healthy for ten, twenty or thirty years longer? What consequences would there be for pension systems, healthcare costs or the labour market? Could new forms of social inequality emerge? For Büsser, these are questions that go far beyond medicine. They have implications for society as a whole.

The real challenge

Scepticism aside, Harry Büsser by no means regards longevity research as a dead end. Significant advances are entirely conceivable in upcoming years in the fields of stem cell research, regenerative medicine and cell programming. The key question, however, is not whether people might one day live to be 150 or even 200 years old. What is far more important is to reduce the number of years between good health and illness. If we succeed in significantly reducing the period of chronic ailments at the end of life and extending the years of good health, much will already have been accomplished – for the individual as well as for society. Perhaps, then, the future of longevity lies not in the dream of attaining immortality, but in a more modest yet realistic vision: living a longer, healthy life, rather than simply living longer.

Artificial intelligence for more healthy years of life

Artificial intelligence is emerging as one of the most important technologies in modern medicine. It is already helping doctors to interpret X-ray, CT and MRI images, identify abnormalities in large volumes of data and take on time-consuming documentation tasks. This speeds up the diagnostic process and reduces the workload on healthcare professionals.

AI opens up new possibilities, particularly in the field of longevity. By analysing health data, laboratory results, genetic information and data from smart watches or other wearables, individual health risks can be identified at an earlier stage. In future, conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes or cancer could, in some cases, be detected before the first symptoms appear. At the same time, AI enables more personalised medicine, in which treatments and preventive measures are better tailored to a person's individual needs.

Despite these advances, people remain first and foremost: AI supports medical decision-making but replaces neither medical expertise nor personalised care. For the technology to realise its full potential, high data protection standards, secure systems and well-trained professionals are crucial. Thanks to a strong research landscape, innovative healthcare institutions and targeted digitalisation initiatives, Switzerland is one of the countries particularly well-placed to help shape the future of AI-supported medicine.



Harry Büsser

Author, financial expert and longevity specialist

Harry Büsser studied business administration, specialising in risk management, at the University of St Gallen (HSG); he is a CFA charterholder and spend many years working as a journalist. He has received numerous awards for his articles on economic and financial topics. Today, he is a subject matter expert at the comparison service Comparis – specialising in property, insurance, the healthcare system and health insurance providers.

His book "Longevity – 50 Antworten rund ums längere Leben", published in 2025 by Edition Beobachter, presents a critical yet open-minded assessment of a growing area of research.

Büsser examines which interventions are scientifically sound – and where hope, hype or marketing predominate.

Büsser already had an interest in longevity whilst working as a journalist. As editor-in-chief of a luxury magazine, he wrote extensively about the quest for a longer, healthier life. His research took on a personal dimension when he became a father at the age of 50: would he still be fit enough to go skiing or play tennis with his daughter when she grew up?

As a financial coach, Büsser is accustomed to differentiating between promise and reality – an approach he also applies to longevity. While much has been promised, little has been delivered so far. Despite encouraging approaches, the 'fountain of youth' remains elusive. In his book, Büsser provides a measured assessment of these advances and questions the movement's core narratives – without fundamentally denying the fascination with the research.

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