

HANDOUT 20-3

Observational Activity: How Long Will You Live?

An individual's life span is determined by many factors, including genetic history, personal health habits, socioeconomic status, and personality. To see how these factors interact, complete the following life expectancy questionnaire for yourself (or for someone you know). The basic life expectancy for American males of all races today is 73.6 years; for females it is 79.4 years. Write this beginning number down; then, as you check through the list, add or subtract the appropriate number of years for each item.

Beginning Life Expectancy

1. Longevity of grandparents
Add 1 year for each grandparent living beyond age 80. Add one-half year for each grandparent surviving beyond the age of 70. _____

2. Longevity of parents
If your mother lived beyond the age of 80, add 4 years. Add 2 years if your father lived beyond 80. _____

3. Cardiovascular disease among close relatives
If any parent, grandparent, or sibling died from cardiovascular disease before age 50, subtract 4 years for each incidence. If any died from the above before the age of 60, subtract 2 years. _____

4. Other heritable disease among close relatives
If any parent, grandparent, or sibling died before the age of 60 from diabetes or peptic ulcer, subtract 3 years. If any died before 60 from stomach cancer, subtract 2 years. Women whose close female relatives have died before 60 from breast cancer should also subtract 2 years. Finally, if any close relatives have died before the age of 60 from any cause except accidents or homicide, subtract 1 year for each incidence. _____

5. Childbearing
Women who cannot or do not plan to have children, and those over 40 who have never had children, should subtract one-half year. Women who have had over seven children, or plan to, should subtract 1 year. _____

6. Mother's age at your birth
Was your mother over the age of 35 or under the age of 18 when you were born? If so, subtract 1 year. _____

7. Birth order
Are you the first-born in your family? If so, add 1 year. _____

HANDOUT 20-3 (continued)

8. Intelligence
If you feel that you are superior in intelligence, add 2 years. _____
9. Weight
If you are more than 30 percent overweight, subtract 5 years. If you are more than 10 percent overweight, subtract 2 years. _____
10. Dietary habits
If you eat a lot of vegetables and fruits, and usually stop eating before feeling full, add 1 year. If you drink five or more cups of coffee per day, subtract one-half year. _____
11. Smoking
If you smoke two or more packs of cigarettes a day, subtract 12 years. If you smoke between one and two packs a day, subtract 7 years. If you smoke less than a pack a day, subtract 2 years. _____
12. Drinking
If you are a moderate drinker, add 3 years. If you are a light drinker, add 1.5 years. If you are a heavy drinker, subtract 8 years. _____
13. Exercise
If you exercise briskly at least three times a week, add 3 years. _____
14. Sleep
If you sleep more than 10 hours or less than 5 hours a night, subtract 2 years. _____
15. Sexual activity
If you enjoy sexual activity at least once a week, add 2 years. _____
16. Regular physical examinations
If you have an annual physical examination by your physician, add 2 years. _____
17. Health status
If you have a chronic illness at present, subtract 5 years. _____
18. Years of education
If you graduated from college, add 4 years. If you attended college but did not graduate, add 2 years. If you graduated from high school but did not attend college, add 1 year. If you have less than an eighth-grade education, subtract 2 years. _____
19. Occupational level (former, if retired; spouse's, if you are not working)
Professional, add 1.5 years; technicians, administrators, managers, and agricultural workers, add 1 year; semi-skilled workers should subtract one-half year; laborers should subtract 4 years. _____

HANDOUT 20-3 (continued)

20. Family income
If your family income is above average for your education and occupation, add 1 year. If it is below average for your education and occupation, subtract 1 year. _____
21. Activity on the job
If your job involves a lot of physical activity, add 2 years. If your job requires that you sit all day, subtract 2 years. _____
22. Age and work
If you are over the age of 60 and still on the job, add 2 years. If you are over the age of 65 and have not retired, add 4 years. _____
23. Rural vs. urban dwelling
If you live in an urban area and have lived in or near the city for most of your life, subtract 1 year. If you have spent most of your life in a rural area, add 1 year. _____
24. Married vs. divorced
If you are married and living with your spouse, add 1 year. Men: If you are separated or divorced and living alone, subtract 9 years (not alone: subtract 4 years). If you are widowed and living alone subtract 7 years (not alone: subtract 3 years). Women: If you are separated or divorced and living alone, subtract 4 years. If you are widowed and living alone, subtract 3 years. If you are separated, divorced, or widowed and not living alone, subtract 2 years. _____
25. Single living status
Unmarried women (living alone or with others) and unmarried men who live with family or friends should subtract 1 year for each unmarried decade past age 25. Unmarried men who live alone should subtract 2 years for each decade after 25. _____
26. Life changes
If you are always changing things in your life—jobs, residences, friends—subtract 2 years. _____
27. Friendship
If you have at least two close friends in whom you can confide almost all the details of your life, add 1 year. _____
28. Aggressive personality
If you have an aggressive and sometimes hostile personality, subtract 2 years. _____
29. Flexible personality
If you are a calm, easygoing, adaptable person, add 2 years. If you are rigid, dogmatic, and set in your ways, subtract 2 years.

HANDOUT 20-3 (continued)

30. Risk-taking personality

If you take a lot of risks, including driving without seat belts, exceeding the speed limit, and taking any dare that is made, subtract 2 years. If you use seat belts regularly, drive infrequently, and generally avoid risks and dangerous parts of town, add 1 year.

31. Depressive personality

Have you been depressed, tense, worried, or guilty for more than a period of a year or two? If so, subtract 1 to 3 years depending upon how seriously you are affected by these feelings.

32. Happy personality

Are you basically happy and content, and have you had a lot of fun in life? If so, add 2 years.

After you have completed the longevity questionnaire, fill in the information requested on the handout and return the response sheet to your instructor.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics. 1999. *United States Department of Health and Human Services*.