



Exercise in long life

It's not too late at 70 to get fit and grow old

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LIFE is not over at 70, according to research showing lifestyle changes even after retirement can improve longevity.

Giving up smoking, losing weight and starting to keep fit in old age may be the secret that help men reach their 90s and beyond.

US research suggests that the effects of smoking, eating junk food and sitting on the couch can be reversed by starting healthy habits as a pensioner.

Centre for Education and Research on Ageing director Professor David Le Couteur, based at Concord Hospital, said there was always time to improve health — but effort was required.

“The single biggest thing people can do if they are worried about ageing and living longer is they can stop smoking,” he said.

US researchers studied 2350 pensioners and found 70-year-old men who smoked had the

slimmest chances of reaching the age of 90, at 22 per cent. At the same age, a man with healthy weight and blood pressure who exercised had a better than 1-in-2 chance of turning 90.

Cutting out exercise reduced the chance to 44 per cent, dropping further with high blood pressure (36 per cent), and obesity (26 per cent).

Professor Le Couteur said there was a very strong link between exercise and healthy ageing. “The problem is getting people to do it,” he said.

ABS data set the life expectancy of an Australian male at 78.7 years, and 83.5 years for women.

Laurie Ward, 68, who plans to kayak in next year's Masters Games with his wife, Jill, said exercise was helping him to age better than some of his former colleagues.

“Just the physical day-to-day activities we do have given us a lot,” he said.



Active: Laurie Ward, 68, and wife Jill, 65, kayak for health and fun

Picture: James Elsby