

# LIFE EXPECTANCY THROUGH THE AGES

Early humans did not generally live long enough to develop heart disease, cancer or loss of mental function. A snapshot of how life expectancy has changed, and the big killers of each era:

AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY

**30** years



**Neanderthals** (30,000 years ago): Died of injuries caused by rock falls, hunting accidents and conflicts. Food scarcity led to malnutrition. These hunter-gatherer groups contracted diseases that spread from animals. Rabies, tuberculosis, brucellosis, yellow fever and encephalitis were widespread.

**38**

**Neolithic** (8500 BC to 3500 BC): Agriculture, irrigation and urbanization brought problems associated with settled populations, such as fecal contamination of water and diseases such as cholera, smallpox, typhoid, polio and influenza. Malaria and other diseases carried by mosquitoes and insects, which fed on domesticated animals, appeared.



**35** **Classical Greece and Rome** (500 BC to 500 AD): Tuberculosis, typhoid fever, smallpox and scarlet fever spread among the denser urban populations. Malnutrition, gastroenteritis and violence were also big killers.

**48** EARLY MEDIEVAL

**Medieval period** (500 AD to 1500 AD): Life expectancy grew with urbanization, but famine caused by crop failures and bubonic plague were the big killers. The Black Death (1347-1351) wiped out 25 million people in Europe and 60 million in Asia, returning several times, culminating in the Great Plague of London (1664-1666). By 1500, life expectancy had dropped back to 38.



**38** LATE MEDIEVAL

**40**

**Victorian** (1850s to 1900): Typhus, typhoid fever, rickets, diphtheria, tuberculosis, scarlet fever and cholera raged in crowded cities.



MEN **70** WOMEN **75**

**1900s:** Better health care, sanitation and living conditions boosted life expectancy to 70 for men and 75 for women by 1950.

CANADA: MEN **82** WOMEN **85**

**Today:** Cancer, heart disease and stroke are the biggest killers in the developed world. Our longer lifespan also comes with unprecedented loss of mental function and mobility problems.

RESEARCH BY RICK SZNAJDER/TORONTO STAR LIBRARY

SOURCES: JOURNAL OF POPULATION RESEARCH, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

We live nearly twice as long now as we did during the middle ages. Which of these factors has helped us most to do that:

- ★ We never do anything unhealthy
- ★ There's sanitation (i.e our sewerage it taken away)
- ★ There's no such thing as disease any more
- ★ Most of us clean ourselves each day
- ★ There's no such thing as war any more
- ★ We've got enough to eat
- ★ We've all got a super healthy diet
- ★ We have hospitals and medicine
- ★ We're all too sensible to do risky things that might lead to death