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Are Longevity Clinics Worth Your Time and (All That) Money?

If you're after personalized support rather than magic elixirs, the answer may be yes, depending on the clinic

By Laura Beil, AARP | Reviewed by Erwin Tan, M.D. | 1 Comments

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Medical assistant Ruth Vergara of Everest Health in Vienna, Virginia, measures Anita Wheaton's grip strength during an October 2024 check-in at the longevity clinic.

GREG KAHN

Longevity clinics are popping up everywhere. In academic medical centers, strip malls and luxury wellness resorts. Many charge big bucks for a dazzling array of diagnostic tests plus anti-aging therapies that don't have a lot of science behind them — things like stem cell therapies and IV vitamin drips. Their waiting lists are filled with wealthy people willing to spend thousands for a dip in the fountain of youth.

There's no solid number — or definition — for these clinics. Estimates say there are hundreds, if not more. But there's no legal restriction on the use of "longevity" branding. So the term can appear on businesses run by medical doctors, as well as social media influencers, chiropractors, gyms, dentists and more. Some are pushing unproven therapies, while others are giving precious time to patients to help them follow research-backed habits for a healthier lifestyle.

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I had a chance to visit two longevity clinics, and I decided to lean away from those catering to the rich and famous and instead see if I could find places that offer reality-based results without breaking the bank. Here's what I found.

Turning back time

For most of her life, Anita Wheaton felt younger than her age. She had a deep well of energy as she raised two kids, cooked family meals and worked as a bookkeeper. She gained a touch of weight along the way, but who doesn't? Around the time she turned 40, her back started aching — first a little, then a lot. At age 42, she learned the cause: severe endometriosis. Her doctor also said she was suffering from a raft of autoimmune conditions.

She and her husband moved from Virginia to Florida in 2015, and severe fatigue set in. At times, driving to appointments, she'd have to stop her car by the side of the road for a quick nap. "I was gaining weight," she recalls. "To wake up with joint pain was not unusual for me."

Wheaton got a message from one pal after a 2021 group Zoom call (remember the pandemic?) who was concerned that she seemed worn, and her face was puffy. "I've never seen you look like this," the friend wrote. Wheaton resolved to try something new. She reached out to Danielle Ruiz.

Everest Health CEO and medical director Danielle Ruiz reviews test results with Anita Wheaton.

Ruiz is the CEO and medical director of a longevity clinic called Everest Health in Vienna, Virgina. Wheaton became one of its first clients. I met Wheaton at Everest in October for her annual check-in. She looked nothing like her two-year-old photos. She's lost more than 50 pounds, and says she feels as energetic as she did in her 20s. At her appointment, she knocked out more than 20 knee push-ups, followed by a series of other physical tests, including grip strength and lung function.

Nothing about the visit felt like a regular checkup, starting with the waiting room's small fountain, green plants and mood lighting. The staff didn't seem to be rushing to the next appointment. At the day's end, 54-year-old Wheaton received an estimate of her biological age: 34. "Biological age" is used as a marker of how fast a person's body is aging; it's not a predictor of how long they will live.

Typical Longevity Tests

These key measures gave Anita Wheaton a "biological age" of 34.

- An intensive physical exam, focusing on neurological, cognitive and cardiovascular function
- Grip strength
- Maximum sit-ups in 60 seconds
- Maximum push-ups
- Body composition, including fat and lean mass
- Early dementia screening
- Pulmonary function testing
- Electrocardiogram
- Loss of height (to determine bone loss or joint compression)
- Anxiety and depression questionnaire
- Lab tests of hormones, insulin resistance, inflammation, vitamin levels and other measures
- VO2 max and resting metabolic rate
- Heart rate and heart rate recovery after exertion

Longevity is a rapidly growing industry. One Los Angeles-based longevity business, called Next Health, plans to have more than 150 locations in the U.S. and abroad by 2027. Problem is, the official definition of "longevity clinic" is still largely open to interpretation. To be sure, many services at these clinics — like measurements of grip strength and lean body mass — are backed by data. Others are promising, but unproven. Some of the more expensive items on the menu — for example, "exosomes" to promote skin rejuvenation — remain the subject of intense scientific debate.

"There's a lot of variety in terms of what these businesses claim to offer," says Leigh Turner, professor of Health, Society & Behavior at the University of California at Irvine. She studies direct-to-consumer marketing of unproven health remedies, including exosome therapies. Exosomes are small structures inside the body. Nobody really knows for sure their role in human health, but they are being offered as therapies for all kinds of aging-related issues. Same with "detoxification" and high-priced IVs. "I think a lot of it will just end up being, in all likelihood, money down the drain with probably no real benefit," Turner says.

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Health for the wealthy

The rise in longevity clinics has occurred as life expectancy in the U.S. has sunk to the lowest of any wealthy country, despite Americans spending the most per capita on health care. The U.S. also has the largest lifespan-health span divide, with Americans living more than 12 years on average with disability or illness. Part of the reason boils down to disparities in access to health care and an insurance payment system that reimburses for sickness. If you're generally well — and want to stay that way for as long as possible — it's largely on you and your own bank account.

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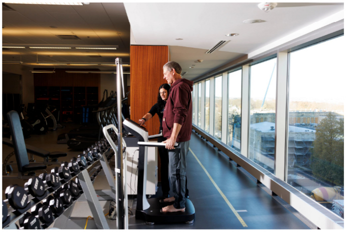
For the billionaire class, the out-of-pocket expenses to grab the gold ring of a long health span seem to have no limit. Tech founder Bryan Johnson spends a reported $2 million a year to keep tabs on the vigor of his every organ. He even receives blood transfusions from his teenage son. It's all put him on the leaderboard of the Rejuvenation Olympics — a competition among the wealthy to push the boundaries of human longevity.

There are plenty of other high-end options. You could spend $20,000 for four pampered days at Canyon Ranch longevity retreat in Arizona, or $40,000 for a one-year longevity-focused membership at Equinox, a high-end fitness chain. At Four Seasons Maui, $44,000 buys you four hours of "longevity sessions," which include ozone therapy (breathing supercharged oxygen) and those popular exosomes, neither of which have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration because any potential benefits to the human body have not been weighed against possible harms.



Jay Eichner stands barefoot to have his body composition analyzed by Mayo Clinic wellness physical therapist Danielle Johnson.

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Longevity for less

But what can you get if your budget is more Holiday Inn than Four Seasons? Even the basics can vary, but some doctors, including those at the Healthy Longevity Medicine Society, are trying to set science-based guidelines. In October 2024, health officials in Abu Dhabi issued a set of criteria for the city's booming longevity business. It is believed to be one of the first official attempts to set guidelines for tests and treatments. The Abu Dhabi criteria emphasize diet and exercise. Other common longevity offerings, like vitamin infusions and hyperbaric oxygen chambers, are sidelined under the heading "needs further data."

That means you shouldn't feel like you're missing out if you can't afford the poolside perks of the ultra-rich. Everest's goal, Ruiz says, is to "make people feel like they're getting the millionaire experience at an affordable price." Everest's base annual fee of $3,500 includes two day-long, in-person sessions at their clinic, and 14 telemedicine check-ins. Patients also can contact Everest any time they have questions.

Anita Wheaton first met Ruiz, a gerontology nurse practitioner, over Zoom in February 2022. Ruiz and her husband started the business, which is backed by private investors, after she completed a fellowship with the Methuselah Foundation, a nonprofit that promotes ways to extend health and "make 90 the new 50." She helped develop the "Methuselah Protocol," science-backed habits, tests and interventions that seek to maximize and measure a person's health span — feeling as good as possible, for a long as possible.

On their first visit, Ruiz spent an hour walking through Wheaton's medical history, lab reports from her primary care physician and her lifestyle. She recommended that Wheaton switch to a plant-based diet and stop drinking alcohol for eight weeks — to try to lower her body's inflammatory response — and recommended a handful of supplements. (Everest Health does not sell supplements themselves, to avoid a conflict of interest in recommendations.) Most importantly for Wheaton, Ruiz solved the puzzle of many of her symptoms: a hormone disorder affecting her insulin levels that doctors had missed. She prescribed Wheaton a medication for insulin resistance.

The thing that's made a profound difference, she told me, is Ruiz's hand-holding to help her drastically reduce her meat and alcohol consumption.

Wheaton told me she has siblings who are paying much more to visit other longevity clinics. "I don't think they're getting any better results than me," she says. "I'm glad they're doing it. I wish everyone could have this level of care."

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Precious time

In fact, the most valuable thing a longevity clinic seems to provide is unhurried time with a provider. The average primary care visit in the U. S. lasts just 18 minutes; once all the tests were done, I watched as Ruiz talked with Wheaton for well over an hour. That's not unusual. At its core, longevity medicine is basically hyper-personalized primary care, says internist Sara Bonnes, M.D., who is head of the second longevity clinic I visited, at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

Mayo opened its clinic, which is only open to current Mayo patients, in 2023. Most come from Mayo's executive health program. There's no extra fee for the longevity clinic, but it's booked up for months, with a waiting list of several hundred. Situated on Mayo's sprawling campus, it's part of the healthy living center (and spa!) that occupies an entire building.

Equipment at the exercise and fitness area at Mayo Clinic's Healthy Living Program and Longevity Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

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The day I visited, I met Jay Eichner while he was standing barefoot on a machine measuring his body composition, wearing a Carhart hoodie and maroon warm-up pants. The 61-year-old farmer from Central Minnesota says he and his wife have been part of Mayo's executive health program, a benefit from her tech company job, for six years. Every other year they drive to Rochester for two days of tests and medical monitoring. This was his fourth visit. He said his goal is not to live forever, but "be healthy and maybe get rid of some of this," he says, chuckling and patting his gut. His mom is 98, so he's optimistic that genes are on his side.

Bonnes told me that the tests offered at Mayo's longevity program have shown some correlation with longer life. Some are relatively simple: How is your balance when you stand heel to toe? How fast can you stand up and sit down five times? (It took my 61-year-old quads 6.84 seconds, by the way.) Others are more complicated, like determining your "cardiac age" or an early cancer-detection blood screening you can have for an extra $900 fee. I left Mayo feeling like their approach is both cutting-edge and incredibly mundane. They don't do full-body MRIs or IV drips of vitamins, two offerings that are common at beachy retreats. Bonnes says there is currently not enough evidence to consider them standard preventive care.

Despite what marketers might say when they are selling DIY brain stimulation devices or supplements that cost as much as a large flat-screen TV, there really isn't a secret sauce for longevity, Bonnes says. In addition to regular doctor's visits, "most of the evidence in advanced health span and lifespan really comes back to the core lifestyle things that we talk about: Diet, exercise, sleep, stress management. There is nothing that will replace the core tenets of just taking care of yourself as a human."

To that end, part of the Mayo protocol includes consultations with nutritionists and exercise specialists who try to help people take healthier habits home for keeps. I met Nolan Peterson, a board-certified health and wellness coach, who asks questions like, "What is your definition of wellness?" The idea, he says, is to help people understand why they have trouble making healthy changes, even when they know they should. Peterson's job isn't unique to Mayo — there are more than 10,000 health and wellness coaches. And health insurers are beginning to cover those costs.

So while you could easily spend tens of thousands of dollars, experts say that longevity mostly comes down to things that don't cost much: eating mostly plants, managing stress, getting seven to eight hours of sleep a night, nurturing social connections and staying physically active regularly. Maybe you need to pay for someone to help you get there, but the goals are all attainable and affordable, even for those of us who'll never get near the podium at the Rejuvenation Olympics.

"Everybody deserves to have good health," Ruiz says, "and to live a long and healthy life." Wheaton agrees: "I look at all these middle-aged women around me and I just want to grab them and say, 'guys, you don't have to give into this middle-aged spread. You can still embrace life and feel young!' "

Laura Beil has written on health and science for Texas Monthly, Men's Health, Science News, Cosmopolitan *and other magazines. Her 2024 article for AARP was "This is Your Mind on Wordle".*

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