

Longer and longer lives: Some remarkable new research findings

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ABSTRACT

Since 1840, in the countries doing best, life expectancy has almost doubled—from 45 years for Swedish females in 1840 to more than 86 years for Japanese females today. The rise has been linear—two and a half years per decade, three months per year, six hours per day. In recent decades remaining life expectancy at age 65 has also been steadily rising—at about 4-5 hours per day in the countries doing best. As life expectancy increases, the healthy span of life is increasing at about the same pace. If improvements continue—and there is no sign of any looming limit—then most children born since the turn of the century in countries with high life expectancy will celebrate their 100th birthdays. A male or female at any age today can expect to live—and to live in good health—a decade longer than the average male or female in his or her parent's generation and two decades longer than the average male or female in his or her grandparent's generation. Also ignored in discussions of retirement is the fact that we don't work very much. Take the total number of hours of work in Germany in a week and divide it by the total German population—it is only 12.5 hours per week. If people retired later and more generally if more people worked, then the average official work week could be cut to 25 hours. The 20th century was a century of the redistribution of income and wealth. The 21st century will be a century of the redistribution of work.