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Retirement age may be extended to 85

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21 February, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Retirement age may be extended to 85

Workers may soon experience major and unwelcome shifts in the lengths of their working lives, if an American consultant is to be believed. The age at which people look forward to early retirement might be consigned to the history books. Instead, we may be hanging up our boots at 85 instead of 65. Stanford University biologist Shripad Tuljapurkar told a science convention in the USA that medical advances could increase human longevity dramatically over the coming decades, rudely reshaping our perceptions and realities of work. Tuljapurkar predicts modern economies will not be able to support their increasingly numerous retirees, greater numbers of who are opting to leave the workforce at increasingly younger ages.

Professor Tuljapurkar forecasts that most people living in today's industrialized societies can expect to become centenarians because of advances in medicine and genetic science. He believes once geneticists unlock the key to the ageing gene, society will have to quickly undergo shifts of seismic magnitude. He predicts a rude awakening for many workers once they discover their insurance and pension companies have not catered for elongated life spans. Dreams of spending one's golden years with a nest egg may have to be put on hold for a decade or two. "Some people believe we are on the brink of being able to extend human lifespan significantly...We have doubled human lifespan in the last century", he said. As a result, accepted societal parameters will change considerably.

WARM-UPS

1. RETIREMENT: In pairs / groups, talk about what life would be like to be retired. Write down five differences of retiring at 65 and 85 years old. Share these with your partners. What are the benefits of each retirement age? Change partners often.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Workers / working lives / sociologists / retirement / history books / medical advances / longevity / centenarians / keys / genes / pensions / nests / eggs

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. AT THE SOCIAL CLUB: You are 100 years old. You have been retired now for 15 years. You are at the retirees social club. Talk to the other centenarians about being 100. What do you do every day? What do you want to do in life? How much longer do you hope to live? Ask each other the questions normal of centenarians.

4. GOLDEN YEARS: Talk about each of these times in our lives. What are the things we typically do during these periods? Would these things change if we lived to be much older and retired at 85 years old?

- Teenage years
- Our twenties
- Being thirtysomething
- Our 40s
- In our 50s
- 60 to 69
- Being a septuagenarian
- Over 100

5. LONGEVITY OPINIONS: What do you think about these opinions? Students A agree with them, Students B disagree.

- a. Scientists should never try to make us live longer.
- b. Increasing our lifespan increases the problems associated with overpopulation.
- c. It's better to die naturally than take medicine to live longer and work until 85.
- d. People retiring at 85 means a much wiser and experienced workforce.
- e. A retirement age of 85 will turn us into a population of slaves.
- f. Extending the retirement age is only good for pension companies.
- g. Early retirement is one of our basic human rights.
- h. Living to be over 100 would be fantastic.

6. RETIREMENT: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "retirement". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. The retirement age may soon be extended for university majors. | T / F |
| b. Early retirement may one day be consigned to the history books. | T / F |
| c. We may be hanging up our boots when we are 85 instead of 65. | T / F |
| d. Modern economies are well able to cope with ageing societies. | T / F |
| e. Many people in the developed world could well live beyond 100. | T / F |
| f. Geneticists will lock the key to ageing. | T / F |
| g. Workers dream of spending their nest years with a golden egg. | T / F |
| h. We have doubled human lifespan in the past century. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| a. consigned | extended |
| b. hanging up our boots | abruptly |
| c. rudely | selecting |
| d. numerous | breakthroughs |
| e. opting | verge |
| f. advances | relegated |
| g. seismic | boundaries |
| h. elongated | enormous |
| i. brink | retiring |
| j. parameters | abundant |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| a. early retirement might be consigned | being able to extend human lifespan |
| b. we may be hanging up our | and realities of work |
| c. medical advances could increase | to the ageing gene |
| d. rudely reshaping our perceptions | to the history books |
| e. greater numbers of who are opting | boots at 85 instead of 65 |
| f. become centenarians because of | awakening for many workers |
| g. unlock the key | human longevity dramatically |
| h. He predicts a rude | with a nest-egg |
| i. spending one's golden years | to leave the workforce |
| j. we are on the brink of | advances in medicine |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Retirement age may be extended to 85

Workers may soon experience major and unwelcome _____ in the lengths of their working lives, if an American sociologist is to be believed. The age at which people look forward to early retirement might be _____ to the history books. Instead, we may be _____ up our boots at 85 instead of 65. Stanford University professor Shripad Tuljapurkar told a science _____ in the USA that medical advances could increase human _____ dramatically over the coming decades, _____ reshaping our perceptions and realities of work. Tuljapurkar predicts modern economies will not be able to support their increasingly numerous _____, greater numbers of who are _____ to leave the workforce at increasingly younger ages.

longevity

shifts

opting

hanging

rudely

consigned

retirees

convention

Professor Tuljapurkar forecasts that most people living in today's industrialized societies can _____ to become centenarians because of advances in medicine and genetic science. He believes once _____ unlock the key to the ageing gene, society will have to quickly _____ shifts of seismic magnitude. He predicts a _____ awakening for many workers once they discover their insurance and pension companies have not catered for _____ life spans. Dreams of spending one's golden years with a _____ may have to be put on hold for a decade or two. "Some people believe we are on the _____ of being able to extend human lifespan significantly...We have doubled human lifespan in the last century", he said. As a result, accepted _____ parameters will change considerably.

elongated

geneticists

societal

rude

expect

brink

nest-egg

undergo

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Retirement age may be extended to 85

Workers may soon experience major and _____ shifts in the lengths of their working lives, if an American sociologist is to be believed. The age at which people look forward to early retirement might be _____ to the history books. Instead, we may be hanging up our _____ at 85 instead of 65. Stanford University professor Shripad Tuljapurkar told a science _____ in the USA that medical advances could increase human longevity dramatically over the coming decades, _____ reshaping our perceptions and realities of work. Tuljapurkar predicts modern economies will not be able to support their increasingly numerous _____, greater numbers of who are _____ to leave the workforce at increasingly younger ages.

Professor Tuljapurkar _____ that most people living in today's industrialized societies can expect to become centenarians because of advances in medicine and _____ science. He believes once geneticists unlock the key to the ageing gene, society will have to quickly _____ shifts of _____ magnitude. He predicts a rude awakening for many workers once they discover their insurance and pension companies have not _____ for elongated life spans. Dreams of spending one's golden years with a _____ may have to be put on hold for a decade or two. "Some people believe we are on the brink of being able to extend human lifespan significantly...We have doubled human _____ in the last century", he said. As a result, accepted societal _____ will change considerably.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'life'** and **'span'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "RETIREMENT" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about retirement.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| • unwelcome | • expect |
| • forward | • key |
| • boots | • seismic |
| • advances | • golden |
| • rudely | • brink |
| • support | • result |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you think its right for scientists to extend our lives so much?
- c. Do you think scientists are playing the role of God in increasing our longevity?
- d. What would society be like if most of the population was over fifty?
- e. What do you think of 85 as a retirement age?
- f. When do you want to hang up your boots?
- g. What do you think of the prospect of living to be 150?
- h. How would life change if we knew we had to work until we were 85?
- i. What new industries would spring up if we retired at 85 and lived to be over 100?
- j. Do you think scientists should unlock the key to the ageing gene?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think increasing our lifespans will create more or fewer problems for society?
- d. Would you be happy to fly on an airplane piloted by an 84-year-old?
- e. If we all lived to be 120, when would middle age be?
- f. What do you think of the idea of having great great great grandchildren?
- g. Do you think retiring at 85 means you'll be very rich and have a huge nest-egg?
- h. Do you think it's possible and desirable for scientists to double our lifespans again?
- i. What societal parameters will change as a result of our retiring at 85 and living to be over 100?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

100: In pairs / groups, talk about the pros and cons of a society having an average lifespan of 100. Use the items in the left hand column to help your conversations.

	PROS	CONS
Workforce		
Pensions		
Babysitting		
New industries		
Crime		
Food		
Healthcare		

Change partners / groups. Tell each other what your previous partner(s) said.
Decide whether you would be in favor or against increasing our longevity.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find information about retirement ages around the world. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. MY RETIREMENT: Outline all the things you hope to do when you are retired. Compare these things with the lives of your grandparents, parents or other retirees you know of. Did everyone want to do similar things when they retire?

4. EFFECTS: Write an essay on the effects of the retirement age on society. What will governments and companies need to change if people retire at 85 and live to be over 100? Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. T d. F e. T f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| a. consigned | relegated |
| b. hanging up our boots | retiring |
| c. rudely | abruptly |
| d. numerous | abundant |
| e. opting | selecting |
| f. advances | breakthroughs |
| g. seismic | enormous |
| h. elongated | extended |
| i. brink | verge |
| j. parameters | boundaries |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| a. early retirement might be consigned | to the history books |
| b. we may be hanging up our | boots at 85 instead of 65 |
| c. medical advances could increase | human longevity dramatically |
| d. rudely reshaping our perceptions | and realities of work |
| e. greater numbers of who are opting | to leave the workforce |
| f. become centenarians because of | advances in medicine |
| g. unlock the key | to the ageing gene |
| h. He predicts a rude | awakening for many workers |
| i. spending one's golden years | with a nest-egg |
| j. we are on the brink of | being able to extend human lifespan |

GAP FILL:

Retirement age may be extended to 85

Workers may soon experience major and unwelcome **shifts** in the lengths of their working lives, if an American sociologist is to be believed. The age at which people look forward to early retirement might be **consigned** to the history books. Instead, we may be **hanging** up our boots at 85 instead of 65. Stanford University professor Shripad Tuljapurkar told a science **convention** in the USA that medical advances could increase human **longevity** dramatically over the coming decades, **rudely** reshaping our perceptions and realities of work. Tuljapurkar predicts modern economies will not be able to support their increasingly numerous **retirees**, greater numbers of who are **opting** to leave the workforce at increasingly younger ages.

Professor Tuljapurkar forecasts that most people living in today's industrialized societies can **expect** to become centenarians because of advances in medicine and genetic science. He believes once **geneticists** unlock the key to the ageing gene, society will have to quickly **undergo** shifts of seismic magnitude. He predicts a **rude** awakening for many workers once they discover their insurance and pension companies have not catered for **elongated** life spans. Dreams of spending one's golden years with a **nest-egg** may have to be put on hold for a decade or two. "Some people believe we are on the **brink** of being able to extend human lifespan significantly...We have doubled human lifespan in the last century", he said. As a result, accepted **societal** parameters will change considerably.