

executive health

the report that briefs you on what to watch

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Alexander Leaf, M.D.:

ON THE PHYSICAL FITNESS OF MEN WHO LIVE TO A GREAT AGE

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: *Alexander Leaf, M.D., Jackson Professor of Clinical Medicine, Harvard Medical School and Chief of Medical Services, Massachusetts General Hospital has traveled the world to examine people who are living to a great age in vigorous health, free from the infirmities and debility which plague so many of our elderly. What he has learned can help you if you want to enjoy living a long, long time in sturdy health.*

—Richard Stanton

In the Caucasian village of Duripshi I found myself running, jumping and slithering down the rocks to keep abreast of Markhti Tarkhil, age 104, as he descended to the cold mountain stream where he had his daily bath. Markhti had related that as long as he could remember he bathed each morning in this fresh stream. We got into our car at Markhti's house to drive down to the stream where we would take pictures. Halfway down the rough road the driver stopped and refused to go further. "If I proceed further down this road I'll never get the car back," he claimed. While we were arguing Markhti jumped from the car and asked, "What are we waiting for?" Whereupon he started down the hill with me in pursuit. It proved to be a difficult and

rough descent, but Markhti moved so quickly and agilely over the rocks and down the river bank that I had difficulty keeping beside him, frightened at what might happen were he to stumble and fall. Knowing how fragile the bones of most of our old people are, I had terrifying visions of picking up the pieces were Markhti to trip. Fortunately, no such mishap occurred and Markhti reached the bottom of the hill ahead of me.

Later I asked the Russian doctors there how often the old people suffered fractures. They shrugged and claimed there rarely were fractures. The constant physical activity of these vigorous elders keeps the balance between bone formation and destruction such that the bones remain mineralized, dense and strong.

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