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What transpires soon will have an influence on your future...

An eye on the future

With more people living to 100, many of us in our 30s and 40s could have the majority of our lives left. So what will the coming years hold? *Healthy's* deputy editor Charlotte Haigh MacNeil spoke to the future prediction experts to find out

I was born at the end of 1974, which means I am part of a generation for whom there's no real blueprint for the future. There have never been any guarantees in life, of course, but our mothers were probably fairly certain they would work for a while, marry and have children, and later retire on their pension, with most living long enough to see grandchildren and possibly great-grandchildren.

But in the last few decades, the world's shifted beneath our feet. Huge improvements in healthcare mean a staggering one in five women my age will live to 100, yet many of us won't have families. Nearly half of graduates, for example, are still childless by 35 – I'm one of them. Meanwhile, the changing financial climate has had a huge impact on the way we live. My working class mum and dad, a secretary and insurance salesman, were able to buy a three-bedroom semi in a leafy London suburb back in 1970, in their early

30s. My husband and I, university-educated professionals aged 40 and 38 respectively, are only just buying our first property, and it's a modest flat. But we're lucky. The generation below us – those in their 20s now – are already being dubbed Generation Rent, with many experts predicting they'll never know the security of owning their own property. And half of all of us currently working are not saving anything for retirement. Some of this seems as though it could have quite worrying repercussions – or will we just need to adapt to very different expectations of how life will be? Here are some predictions...

Age will mean less

Although we currently tend to view an ageing society as a negative, that perception may start to shift, believes futurist Anne Lise Kjaer, founder of future trend forecasting agency Kjaer Global. As so many of us will live deep into old age, we'll start to see the

growth of what she calls the No-Age Society. 'The "No-Age Seniors" will be active participants in society and agents of positive change,' says Kjaer. 'Having spent their adult lives in a world of global mobility and connectivity, the No-Age Seniors won't settle for traditional retirement. They certainly don't plan to stop working. The four-generation workforce will soon become a reality – with four different generations in the workforce at the same time.' This is good news for me – with no pension, it doesn't look as though retirement will be an option.

In the workplace, things may feel different, believes Kjaer. 'Empathic leadership and values will hold sway,' she says. The new emphasis on empathy may favour women – though data shows that it could be 98 years before we make the same money as men at senior level in the UK.

Not that we'll be putting in a traditional nine to five. Futurist Thomas Frey ♦♦

predicts 2 billion jobs worldwide will disappear by 2030, but different roles will replace at least some of these. Robots will 'man' fishing boats, farms, trains, buses and taxis – in fact, most physical jobs will cease to exist. Frey thinks the world of education will be transformed, with students learning remotely from downloaded courses – there'll be fewer teachers and more course designers. The advent of 3D printing – DIY devices that 'print' solid objects – means we'll be able to create our own clothes, so manufacturing jobs will vanish in favour of work in 3D printing, product design and repair. And if I'm still writing in a few decades, it's likely to be for magazines in digital form only.

I'm heartened to hear I may not have to commute if I'm going to be working into my latter years. 'The concept of the home office will be redefined, with potentially more than 12 million people in the UK working from home as soon as 2020,' says Kjaer. Increasing use of cloud computing (in which data is stored virtually and can be accessed from anywhere) will mean we can work in teams with people around the world as though they're at desks around us. Kjaer also predicts the emergence of the futuristic-sounding 'smart pod car', a kind of mobile office where every function will be operated by voice.

We'll face new health hurdles

Being able to lead an active and busy old age does depend on a reasonable level of health. And there are some big disease challenges ahead if we're to make the most of a long life, Kjaer acknowledges. 'Lifestyle diseases such as stress, obesity, cancer and heart disease will reach epidemic levels,' she says. Rising obesity is already a major concern. 'Globally, more than 1 billion of us are above our ideal weight,' says Kjaer. 'And it's predicted by 2050 more than 50 per cent of the UK population will be obese – many of them kids.' The other inescapable fact of ageing is dementia. Across the world, 36 million people are living with it, and that figure's set to treble by 2050.

But there's good news, too: there are promising developments in the treatment of certain killer diseases. Cancer treatment could be revolutionised by personalised medicine, in which the molecular makeup of your cancer is tested so it can be treated very precisely. And scientists are working all the time on drugs to target different drivers of cancers, which may be more effective than conventional treatments. Experts predict these breakthroughs will mean cancer becomes a disease you live with and manage, rather than something that kills you.

Kjaer thinks our lifestyles will be subject to sweeping change, which may help keep us healthier. 'As many people spend over 90 per cent of their time indoors, our environments will become smarter and more in tune with our physical needs [ie more virtual sports in the home], and could be a tool to boost future health and wellbeing,' she says. Healthcare will shift from episodic – treating you when you're ill – to longitudinal care, monitoring you on a continuous basis, probably with the help of connected devices such as smartphones.

Sustainability concerns may increasingly affect our eating habits. 'With zero carbon targets for 2050, low-carbon lifestyle preferences will encourage "sustainable food storage" to minimise journeys to the shops. We will also experiment with old-style cooking techniques to save energy, such as slow-cooking in hay boxes,' says Kjaer.

We are slowly waking up to the realisation that money alone doesn't equal a better life

We'll take a more holistic approach to wellbeing, she says, with more understanding of the link between mind and body. 'Wellbeing and happiness will become a core part of corporate social responsibility, and a key concern of governments. So paid "time out" for rest days may become the norm,' says Kjaer.

We'll live in communities

'By 2050, 80 per cent of the world's population will live in urban centres [due to population increase], and four out of 10 cars will be electric,' says Kjaer. And forget the concept of a nuclear family in a house – the housing shortage plus the need to care for children and elderly parents at the same time could mean a huge shift in the way we live. 'We may see a rise in trans-generational families: kids, parents and elders all under one roof,' says Kjaer. She predicts this may change our values as well as our lifestyles,



As Charlotte embarks on married life, she's buoyed by expert predictions of a more spiritual time ahead

encouraging a more caring, sharing attitude. Those of us without children are still likely to benefit from this heightened community spirit – we could see a rise in communal living, with more of us living in cooperative housing arrangements, with our own personal living space, but shared facilities. As we're likely to spend more time at home – potentially working, exercising and spending much of our leisure time there, homes may be divided into 'we zones' for interactive time and 'me zones' for reflection and relaxation.

We'll share more and buy less

'There'll be more focus on sharing rather than owning things,' says Kjaer. 'We'll be given more product and service information to fit individual needs in the future. We will spend less, but make better, more informed choices.' Influenced by the recession, environmental concerns and an ageing population, our values are set to shift. 'We are waking up to the realisation money alone does not equate to a better life,' says Kjaer. 'New ideals are informing our quest for the good life, and we'll rate relationships, sustainable living and meaning as essential for a fulfilled life.'

If the last century was all about 'me', the present one is moving towards 'we', Kjaer believes. I feel encouraged. When I started researching this piece, I feared I'd be given doom-laden prophecies about widespread old-age poverty, environmental catastrophe and financial meltdown. And while those may be part of our future, too, I feel more confident we'll learn to roll with the punches and lead the way towards more hopeful, spiritual and empathic times. **II**