

Greg Heisler



# America's Health Messenger

Dr. Sanjay Gupta uses journalism as his platform to help more people live healthier and longer.

by **Sandra Bienkowski**

**S**anjay Gupta sees himself as a doctor first, but he is best known as CNN's chief medical correspondent, reporting on breaking medical and health news, and translating technical medical jargon into information viewers can use to live longer, healthier lives.

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"People look at my two careers as disparate, but I see them along the same continuum," Gupta says. "As a doctor, I take care of patients one at a time, and as a communicator, you do it for lots of people at the same time. I think part of my job is to provide knowledge for people that is actionable."

A practicing neurosurgeon, Gupta, 40, is also an Emmy award-winning reporter. He reported on the war in Iraq as an embedded correspondent with the U.S. Navy's medical unit and from New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

He's the associate chief of neurosurgery at Grady Memorial Hospital and an assistant professor at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta.

As a medical correspondent, he travels the world, gathering research and information to help people live longer and healthier. It has become his *ikigai*, an Okinawan term for sense of purpose, he says. Gupta believes a sense of purpose should be rooted in the daily question, *What can I do today to make the world a better place?* "As a healthcare provider, I want to help people become more knowledgeable or directly impact their health as a neurosurgeon."

But he didn't always know what he was meant to do. "I was a writer for a long time on health care and healthcare policy, and then I worked in the White House, primarily as a White House Fellow writing speeches for then first lady Hillary Clinton. And it got me interested in the different ways to get messages out there. It gave me the bug a little bit."

The next part was a bit serendipitous, he says. "I was recruited by the guy who was the CEO of CNN at the time. I wasn't at all sure what I was getting myself into when I first started. But it's seven or eight years later now, so it has been very interesting to me."

Gupta also co-hosts *Accent Health* for Turner Private Networks, providing medical segments for the syndicated version of *ER* on TNT and has launched a weekly podcast on iTunes called *Paging Dr. Gupta*. He began tweetering in May, and in two months' time, has a half-million followers.

"I have a lot of people come up to me who say, 'I am here today because of what you said.' That is very gratifying to me."

He shares his message on how to live a long and productive life in his *New York Times* Best-Seller, *Chasing Life*. His second book is the newly released *Cheating Death*.

"We have this basic understanding that when the heart stops beating, the person has passed away. There are a lot of other ways to reverse that process along the way," Gupta says. *Cheating Death* explores the idea that people live when no one thought they would. "It's about dissecting

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## Vital Steps

Sanjay Gupta's

**SUCCESS STRATEGIES**



**Be present.** "I often get asked, *What's next?* It's OK to be where you are. I like where I am right now. The key is to let yourself enjoy it."

**Take responsibility.** "The obesity epidemic is a community responsibility. We don't live in a culture in America that promotes activity. There are a lot of cars, not a lot of walking paths. People aren't getting out as much as they used to, and the cheapest foods are the worst for us."

**Stress less and have a good attitude.** "Stress hormones can harden the arteries faster, make your skin more sallow, and can cause gray hairs. People with a good attitude have fewer of those stress hormones circulating and tend to be better about going to the doctor because they are more hopeful they are going to be around for a while."

**Strengthen your upper body.** "Studies have shown that people who have upper-body strength have better inspiratory capacity and later in life are less prone to pneumonia, a huge killer at hospitals and nursing homes."

**Follow his routine.** "I eat breakfast every day because studies show you will eat 30 percent less throughout the day if you start out with a good breakfast. I meditate every day so I am a lot less impatient. I exercise every day. It doesn't make sense to skip a workout. It's only 45 minutes a day; that's not a lot of time."

**Stay consistent with exercise.** "You have to really want it for it not to fall off the map. Once you start working out regularly and you see how good it feels and how posture and energy levels improve, you become addicted to it."



## Cheating Death

The Doctors and Medical Miracles that Are Saving Lives Against All Odds

by Dr. Sanjay Gupta

In his new book, *Cheating Death*, Dr. Sanjay Gupta chronicles the efforts of doctors who refuse to accept that any life is irretrievably lost and the science that has made seemingly miraculous recoveries possible.

Drawing on extensive case files and his access to breaking news in medicine, Gupta explains how technological advances and an increased understanding of the human body's survival mechanisms are actually shifting the line between life and death. Sharing stories of medical triumphs, Gupta illustrates how doctors are changing the way they respond to the seeming boundaries that mark the beginning and end of human life.

The following excerpts are from *Cheating Death*, by Dr. Sanjay Gupta, reprinted with permission from *Wellness Central*, an imprint of *Grand Central Publishing*.

Whether because of a car accident, a blockage in an artery or a tumor somewhere in your body, it is generally understood that when the heart stops beating, life has ended. I have seen this play out more times than I care to remember.

The first time, I was a third-year medical student at the University of Michigan. The patient was not much older than I was. I remember the call coming over the radio: "23-year-old unrestrained driver in an MVA [motor-vehicle accident] found with the windshield starred and the steering wheel bent." Even then, I knew those details were important; it takes a lot of force to bend a steering wheel with your chest or smash a windshield

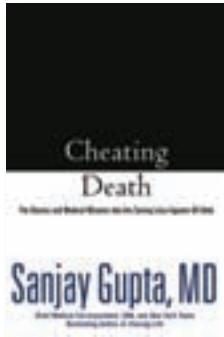
with your head. I remember the trauma surgeons, neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons descending upon this young man. They were replacing blood, stopping bleeding and relieving pressure in his brain. It was a whirlwind of activity until... his heart stopped. And then everything else stopped, too. Everyone knew that was the end. That's what we were taught in medical school and throughout our training. But what if it doesn't have to be that way? What if there was a way to give that 23-year-old man, and millions like him, a little more time? Ever since I watched that young man

die, I have pondered that very question: Can we move the line?

When we challenge conventional wisdom, we may find that treatments we've taken for granted—like traditional CPR—aren't terribly effective, and we may find newer approaches that work better. What I have seen time and time again is that simple treatment can indeed be the best life-saving method when it comes to emergency care. The biggest breakthrough in emergency resuscitation of the past 30 years is a new version of CPR that involves nothing more than pressing the victim's chest, firmly and rapidly.

Whether we're a doctor or a patient, we tend to think that life and death are under our control, and to an extent, they are. That's why we go to the doctor in the first place: to help us heal. That's what motivates medical mavericks: They push the boundaries of our knowledge. They try and shift that line in the sand between life and death, saving many lives in the process. But there is something else: As good as our science becomes, there may always be something else that allows someone to recover and heal when all hope was lost. I have learned that while we can never truly vanquish death, there will always be countless stories about how we cheated it.

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Deborah Feingold/Corbis

why some people have a very good outcome and taking lessons learned and applying it across the board."

Everyone has a personal responsibility to take care of his or her body for people who love them and for people they love, says Gupta, who is married with three kids—his youngest born last March. "After having kids, I really came to the realization of something I have known all along, that life doesn't last forever. For some people, it's having kids, for other people, it could be an illness or a loved one who gets sick and passes away. It got me thinking that we all have a certain time on Earth, and if we want to live longer lives, we want to make sure that life is more exceptional—free of disease, full of function, mentally and physically."

He hopes to share what he learns with as many people as he can. "There's a lot more healthcare illiteracy in this country than people realize. A lot of people are confused as to how to best take care of themselves. I hope to become a bridge for people who want good healthcare knowledge." **S**