

Press Release

Longevity and Cancer: A new research program at IFOM in Milan. It will be conducted by a “Scientist without borders”: Valter Longo

An Italian-American researcher and expert on longevity at the University of Southern California, the world’s leading research center in this field, Longo will establish a new research program at IFOM in Milan that will focus on the correlation between longevity and cancer.

One of his studies, published in the June issue of *Cell Stem Cell*, demonstrates the ability of fasting to strengthen the immune system and defend it against the side effects of chemotherapy.

Born in Genoa in 1967, Valter Longo left Italy at age 16 determined to pursue a career as a Rock musician in the US. He still has a passion for music, but another flame was soon ignited, a passion for Science. In particular, for the study of aging, which he identified immediately as the most promising medical field for the future. Today he is a Professor of Biogerontology and Director of the Institute on Longevity at the University of Southern California (USC) Davis School of Gerontology in Los Angeles, the very cradle of studies on aging. USC started the world's first center for research and training in gerontology in the 60's, and today is the largest and most influential institution in this field. Over the years, the scientific approach pursued by Longo has revealed a variety of genetic mechanisms involved in aging, identified therapeutic and preventive strategies to fight the development of cancer and other serious diseases, and revealed the crucial role of caloric restriction in slowing the rate of aging.

His research published in the June issue of the prestigious scientific journal *Cell Stem Cell* shows that 2-6 cycles of prolonged fasting (2-4 days) may trigger regeneration of the immune system by stimulating stem cell renewal. Not only, but the research shows that fasting protects the body against collateral damage to the immune system from chemotherapy.

His links with Italy have remained strong during his career in the United States: much of his research has centered on the relationship between longevity and the traditional diet of southern Italy, including many collaborations with Italian colleagues and Universities. Now Longo has decided to bet more aggressively on Italy: a few days ago, he officially joined forces with IFOM (FIRC Institute of Molecular Oncology) in Milan, where he initiated the *Longevity and Cancer* research program. "I have known IFOM well and for many years as one of the top cancer research centers in Italy and Europe," says Longo "Then, at one point I was invited to conduct a workshop. Although before coming, I was not thinking about a position at IFOM, after having visited the Institute, I was surprised to find that it is possible to conduct top-level research in Italy, just as in Los Angeles or Boston. So when I discussed this possibility with colleagues at IFOM, I thought it would be a great place to start a research program." When fully operational, his IFOM team will be composed of 10 researchers whose research paths will cross those of the other 300 active researchers from 27 countries at the Milanese Institute.

Longo will continue to conduct research in parallel at the University of Southern California. Not a "returning brain" as Italians like to refer to returning expat Scientists, but a "Scientist without borders" as he likes to

define himself, with a dual scientific nationality and one goal: "The goal that I set as a researcher is to do science at the highest level, without ever losing the stimulation of creativity, but always using this knowledge to solve the real, large problems of medicine. With my team in the IFOM laboratories I will focus on cancer."

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