

How to Live to be 100 and Greater – An Unofficial Guide

by Jan Haskell-Mohr

Icon Iris Apfel continued to influence the world of design at age 102. Award-winning actor, screenwriter, and producer Norman Lear was nominated for an Emmy at 101. At 102, Raymond Surette was recently honored with the highest French award, the Knight of the Legion of Honor for his service in World War II.

The number of people in the world who have achieved the 100-year-old milestone is increasing every year. Not everyone is an icon, wins an Emmy, or receives a high honor, but many centenarians, those who are 100 years old or greater, are living productive, happy lives.

According to the United Nations, there are almost 600,000 people aged 100 or greater in the world. It's predicted that number will rise to 3.7 million by 2050. So, what's contributing to this longevity? Good genes help, but seniors today refuse to take their advancing age lying down and are more active than ever. That goes a long way, but are there other factors at play? You'd think education, income, and profession would play into the longevity equation, but according to the experts, they don't. It turns out three influences seem to stand out: genetics, activities, and social connections.

Your grandmother lived to be 95? Your mom is quickly approaching 100? Chances are, you'll benefit from their long lives. Although there are various estimates for a genetic influence, most of the latest studies agree about 25% of the variation in longevity is determined by genetics. The great news is, even if your family is not known for living long lives, it doesn't mean you can't buck the trend. Physical activity and social interaction may play an even stronger role in determining longevity.

Many studies have shown a connection between activity levels and heart health. The more you exercise, even moderately, the better your heart health. A large [study](#) conducted over 30 years and including more than 116,000 people concluded that going beyond the recommended activity levels helps even more. According to the study, high activity for 75-300 minutes per week and moderate activity for 150-600 minutes per week can reduce mortality by about 35% to 42%. Another study looked at the habits of centenarians and found most continued to be physically active well into their later years. Always make sure you consult your physician before starting or increasing any exercise program.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked factors leading to a longer life is socialization. Harvard Health Publishing cited an observational [Chinese study](#) backing up the idea that socialization helps people live longer. And it doesn't take a lot of socialization. More than 28,000 participants with an average age of 89 were studied and evaluated for "health, lifestyle habits, and self-reported social activity." In every group studied, those who socialized at all lived longer than those who did not, and those who socialized daily lived the longest.

Beyond longevity, there are a lot of reasons to get out and visit. It's estimated more than 25% of adults 65 and older are socially isolated, creating one of the major reasons for depression in seniors. There are many other important reasons to go to that weekly BINGO game or have Sunday dinner with the family. These social activities lower the risk of loneliness and isolation, dementia, and chronic disease.

So, you're living longer, but what can you do to live better? There is an increasing chance for losing bits of memory and thinking as we age, but learning new skills helps delay that decline. A recent study by [Scientific American](#) measured the memory and attention scores of participants, who were 58 to 86 years old. After a three-month learning program, the participants had significantly improved their memory and attention scores. They were measured again a year after the program, and cognitive abilities maintained their higher levels – some levels similar to adults 50 years younger.

The more seniors are active, social, and involved with their health, the healthier they are. Many in the healthcare community have taken action to give seniors access to resources that help. Health and wellness centers focusing on comprehensive care offer primary and specialty care, fitness and health classes, and activities geared toward keeping patients well. Rather than waiting for patients to get sick, these health and wellness organizations focus on keeping their patients well. Well care vs. sick care results in healthier patients with much better outcomes.

The 102-year-old recipient of the Legion of Honor, Raymond Surette, is a patient at CareMax, Inc., a network of value-based care locations focusing on underserved seniors. Every patient at CareMax has access to a comprehensive suite of health and wellness services, combining primary care, specialists, dental and vision care, social services, health education, diagnostics, activities, and pharmacy with transportation to get members to and from their appointments.

"This focus on the whole person is central to our model of care," said Dr. Mayda Antun, CareMax's Chief Clinical Officer. "Our patient population is underserved seniors, many of whom have multiple chronic conditions needing constant monitoring. Comprehensive, coordinated care allows us to take care of all aspects of a patient's health and well-being. We develop an entire care program for each patient."

CareMax creates a sense of community.

"Our locations, with their ongoing social and wellness activities, become centers of the community," said Dr. Antun. "Our patients don't only come to us when they're sick; they come to us when they're feeling great and just want a game of dominoes or a fitness class with friends. This is where they can both socialize and get their care."

Companies like CareMax focus on keeping people healthy. And it works. CareMax patients visit the emergency room 69% less than their counterparts and have 46% less hospital admissions.* At last count, more than 30 CareMax patients have reached the 100-year-old milestone.

National Centenarians Day is September 22, a time to honor and celebrate those who have reached 100 years old and beyond. Living a long life is a goal for almost everyone. Genetics notwithstanding, there are things you can do to live longer, keep moving, keep dancing, keep learning. Living to 100 and beyond is possible, just ask Iris, Norman, and CareMax's own, Raymond Surette.

* Reflects data for last twelve months ended July 31, 2022, for all Medicare patients enrolled at CareMax Centers & MSO Network.

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