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Angela Bassett Says *9-1-1* Feels Like 'Art Imitating Life,' Shares How It Influences Her Approach to Health (Exclusive)

The actress opens up to PEOPLE about prioritizing her health at 67

By Vanessa Etienne Updated on August 27, 2025 03:33PM EDT

Angela Bassett knows what it takes to prioritize her health, but she admits that there was a learning curve.

Speaking with PEOPLE, the Oscar-nominated actress opened up about how her perspective on health has shifted — not only through her personal experiences, but also thanks to her role on *9-1-1*.

Like many people, the 67-year-old admits she wasn't as focused on her health early on.

"It's something you, as a young person, take for granted," she tells PEOPLE. "You know, you're invincible, you do anything. Eat what you like, sleep as little as you like, enjoy it all. And as you mature, you back up off that a little bit."

Bassett says one of the turning points for her was witnessing her late mother's complications from heart disease and her uncle's battle with type 2 diabetes.

"I've seen up close the impact that poor health can have," she says. "I've spoken about my loved ones and the challenges that they faced in terms of managing and battling serious life-threatening medical issues."

She quickly realized that "when you get as far down the road as they did, trying to play catch-up can be really difficult."

Additionally, starring as Police Sergeant Athena Grant on *9-1-1* encouraged Bassett to think more about health-related issues.

“In playing this character, a lot of the stories that are coming up, it’s like art imitating life. Sometimes I joke and say, 'Do you have a camera in my home? You know, are you peering into my life?'" There’s a few similarities here and there.”

While calling it a “great joy” to play such a “powerful” character, Bassett admits that the show has taught her that “there’s power in prevention” when it comes to health. “It became apparent to me that it’s the key,” she adds.

Portraying a first responder on screen has also helped her realize the importance of acting fast.

That’s why she’s recently partnered with GSK for the Sideline RSV campaign, hoping to educate older adults and their loved ones about the risks of RSV, respiratory syncytial virus, and the importance of getting vaccinated. Each year, approximately 177,000 adults 65 and older are hospitalized in the United States due to RSV, and an estimated 14,000 of those cases result in death.

“A dear, dear friend of mine — she actually cared for my mother when I was away on sets or away in LA — her mother contracted it. So I've been up close and personal with RSV through friends,” Bassett shares. “So as we're saying bye to summer and hello to the colder temperatures, now would be the perfect time to speak to your doctor or pharmacist about your risk and about vaccination, if that’s something that's appropriate for you.”

“Because I have this platform, it's important that I can highlight or encourage others to think about these things in a meaningful way. It starts with awareness… so I raise my hand, raise my voice and put myself out there.”

After celebrating her 67th birthday this month, the *Black Panther* star says that prevention is something she now channels into her own life.

“I value my health and I love this life,” Bassett tells PEOPLE. “So I just do the best that I can 80% of the time.”

Noting that she can be on set for up to 16 hours a day, she teases that her regimen definitely doesn’t include waking up at 3 a.m. to work out. Instead, the actress keeps

a walking pad in her trailer to get at least 30 minutes of movement into her day, and she pays more attention to how she's fueling her body.

"I love sweets and I grew up in the South where it's pork rinds and all of that," she quips. "It just has to be a memory now. Now it's about prioritizing your rest and the food you ingest and considering yourself — as I tell my sister — like you are a VIP. You need the best things and you treat yourself in the best possible way."

"If we manage those things earlier and when we're in a healthier phase of our life, then we can gracefully — hopefully — grow into a mature age where we are healthy and vital," says Bassett.