

LIFE IN **TRIPLE DIGITS**

Longevity tips from the experts

In 1990 there were just 36,000 centenarians, according to the Census Bureau. In 2009, nearly two decades later, that number had increased 78 percent to 64,000 individuals.

Those who are over 100 still make up a very small percentage of the population (.01 percent in 1990 and .02 percent in 2009). But as 79 million Baby Boomers continue to move into the later years of life that percentage will greatly expand.

Centenarians may have a lot to teach those of us who not only want to live long lives, but are aiming to make those lives healthy and happy, says Laura Carstensen, director of the Stanford Center on Longevity.

Those who want to live to be 100 or older can take several steps to try to get there, including maintaining strong family relationships, getting plenty of regular exercise, having great social relationships, eating well, refraining from excessive drinking, and of course, not smoking.

But as far as guarantees go, bad news. There aren't any.

"Anybody who thinks that my advice about living a long time is something that comes with a guarantee is crazy," Carstensen says. "There is great, great risk in living. You can get hit by a truck but you can also get hit by cancer."

"All of us who live to be very old can account for a lot of that by just pure luck," she says.

Of course, she adds, "that doesn't mean you throw your hands up

and forget about the other 50 or 60 percent of it."

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Marie Wiedeman, 101, says she doesn't know why she's still here. But she does say she maintained a balanced life.

Wiedeman, who lives at Good Samaritan Lutheran Health Care Center in Delmar, N.Y., suggests watching one's health and getting plenty of sleep.

"Get fresh air and don't indulge in soft drinks and two kinds of desserts. I ate very simply, really. We didn't go to extremes with rich desserts and things like that."

She also says it's very important to avoid stress. As a school teacher, she says she could always tell the children who came from a stressful home environment. And they weren't happy.

At 101, she still stays involved as she can. "I am still interested in what goes on in the world," she says. "I'm wondering how they're going to resolve Iran and Iraq."

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Angelina Alaimo, 101, says her secret is simple.

"I love life and I don't want to act like an old lady. I'm very happy," says Alaimo, who now lives at Shorefront Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing Care in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Happily married at 15, she had the first of five children at 16. She had four daughters and one



▶ **ANGELINA ALAIMO**
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son, who passed away. She now has 23 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren, and six great-great-grandchildren. And she loves them all.

Her advice is to treat life "like a rose. Take care of it. If not, it's going to droop. Always think you are young. You'll get along all right. Always love life."

Courtesy of MHS

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Kathryn Fogel always ate what she wanted to eat. She smoked for a few years and truth be told, enjoyed a "good drink" from time to time: Scotch and water, to be precise.

These days Fogel has to stay away from the hard stuff, given the medications she takes. But at a century plus eight years, she's "as happy as a 108-year-old person can be."

Fogel, who lived independently until last year, now lives at Phoebe Home Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, in Allentown, Pa. She has no children of her own but has plenty of visits from her nephews and nieces.

She's spent much of her life volunteering. She volunteered in her community's library and started a Girl Scout troop. And she compiled news from Coplay, Pa., where she lived, and sent it to the borough's soldiers once a month during the Second World War.

She was the treasurer of Coplay's recreation and welfare association, a local historian, and an active member of her church.

And she also traveled frequently, including several trips to Europe. For her 90th birthday, relatives gave her a hot-air balloon ride.

Her secret to living so long? "I don't know. I have no secret," she says. "I did whatever I wanted to do. I'm satisfied with my life."

But she does have advice: "Just enjoy life as it comes," she says. "Do the best you can."

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Bob Anderman can't figure out why she's made it to 103.

"Maybe it's good genes," she says. "I try to take vitamins and stuff like that."

She adds that she was never a drinker and only went to doctors when she had to.

She also socializes and has frequent visits from her family. "I don't feel isolated," she says. "That makes such a difference in

"... ALWAYS THINK YOU ARE YOUNG. YOU'LL GET ALONG ALL RIGHT. ALWAYS LOVE LIFE."



life, especially at my age. I don't run around but I do get around on my own. I participate in the activities here. I'm comfortable."

Like others, she advises against worry. "You always have problems you have to cope with," she says. "That's part of life. Keeping an optimistic outlook helps a lot."

"One way to get old is to keep worrying about getting old," she says. "I think one way to live life is to take it as it goes along and to be optimistic. You can't carry grudges to the end of your life. Anger doesn't make you feel younger or better. That's for sure."

She also peppers her conversation with frequent laughter. Sure, she could complain. She's had her share of problems and illness. But she just doesn't find it useful.

"Why should I sit around and cry when I can't do anything about it? Better to laugh than to cry."

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Irma Franklin, who lives in Laguna Woods, Calif., attributes

her long, healthy life to "attitude, attitude, positive attitude," she says, adding quickly, "and genes."

Franklin says, "Look for the positive side of life and accept it and it will work for you."

Franklin never married or had kids, but was a teacher "so I raised other people's kids."

She is drawn to other positive people and stays away from people who complain frequently. Not that life is all rosy, she adds. But no matter what is thrown your way, it's important to "laugh a lot and smile a lot."

"And sometimes you need to cry. And that's okay. Just don't allow yourself to pity yourself. I think it's a very important thing. Don't blame anyone else for what's happening to you. You have to take an independent attitude—a positive and independent attitude."

"What happens to you is up to you. So you made a mistake. That mistake has been made many times by someone else. So you learn from it and you make a different choice next time. You're always learning."

— Janet Kornblum for USA TODAY