

# SENIOR **RESOURCES** GUIDE

## Ready for the Next Adventure

THE VIEW  
FROM  
AGE 100

**WashingtonJewishWeek**



**Jewish Council for the Aging**  
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# It's All About Growing Older, Not Old

There was a time not so long ago when working past the age of 66 was uncommon. That was the age when people dusted off their golf clubs, visited their grandchildren and started thinking about the next phase of life. Was it time to sell that home, turn in those car keys or take dancing lessons and go on a long cruise?

Fast forward to the 21st century. Sixty is the new 40 and 70 is looking pretty darn good. People sixty and older are common, and even sought after, in the work place. They can be found on the tennis and pickle ball courts, running around the neighborhood, starting a new job or even their own company.

President Joe Biden is 80, and former President Donald Trump is 77. John Glenn traveled into space at 77. Former President George Bush Sr. celebrated his 90th birthday by jumping out of an airplane. According to the website Welbi, Nola Ochs graduated college when she was 95 years old. Not content to sit in her rocking chair and gaze at her diploma, Nola received her master's degree three years later.

Anna Mary Robertson Moses, known more familiarly as Granma Moses, didn't even start painting until she hit 76. That was when her arthritis was kicking up, and she had trouble holding her embroidery needle. She continued painting thousands of drawings for many years and living to be 101.

In 1828, Noah Webster published a dictionary when he was 70 years old.

The list of these amazing accomplishments goes on and on, and the age of achievers keeps edging closer to 100 and beyond.

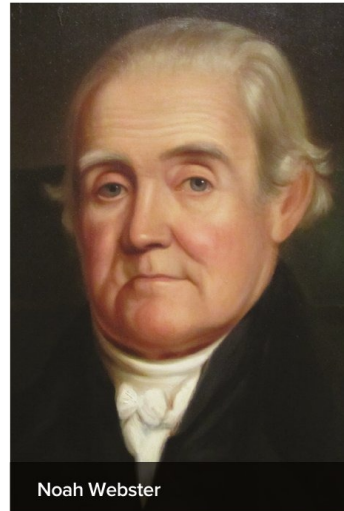
According to the U.S. Census 2021 population estimates, older Americans will outnumber children in about 10 years.

In 2016, there were about 49.2 million adults who were 65 years and older. That same year, there were 73.6 million children under the age of 18. By 2034, projects point to 77 million adults at least 65 years of age, and 76.5 million children under the age of 18.

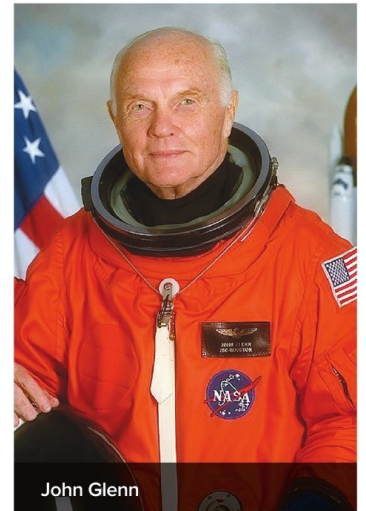
In 2020, 33 million people were between the ages of 65 and 74, according to the U.S. Census. Between the ages of 75 and 84, there were 16.3 million people, and



President Joe Biden



Noah Webster



John Glenn

there were 5.7 million who ranged in age from 85 and 94.

The United States ranked 34th in 2020 among peer nations for having the largest share of older residents. Japan was first.

Back in 1920, fewer than 5 million people were 65 years or older. That number keeps inching up as health care and diet improve along with lifestyles.

America once was a rural country with so many people involved in farming. Then the industrial revolution heralded a move to urban areas and new jobs. Around the 1920s, a majority of residents lived in urban areas. With that change, came an increase in life expectancy and for some, many long happy years after retirement and raising a family.

Arlene Bennett is 90 and no longer driving, but that certainly doesn't mean she is sitting around. Her Buick LeSabre with "a little over 100,000 miles" is always prepped for the next adventure. "If people have a license, we're good to go," she said about her friends and relatives who now do the driving for her.

Many of her car's 100,000 miles were accumulated traveling from state to state, binoculars in hand, finding as many new species of birds as possible. The Texan has a list of more than 600 birds she has seen with her own eyes. Birding was her number one hobby for more than 40 years.

She has since turned her binoculars over

to her grandchildren, who share her love of birding, but that doesn't mean Arlene isn't still enjoy birdwatching. The giant sunflowers she grows on her patio attract birds, especially as they flowers dry up.

Arlene had a career as a librarian and totally enjoyed opening new boxes and releasing that new book smell. She's in a book club now and maintains her love for reading and books. She also enjoys watching movies, which she said take her to another time and place.

"It's like going on an adventure," she said.

When her husband of 66 years was alive, she played a lot of bridge. She still plays every Tuesday and has found enjoyment in playing 42, a game involving dominoes and four people.

She makes sure she walks up and down her apartment hallway several times a day. "I walk from one end of the place to another. I try to walk as much as I can," she said. She takes her time, explaining, "I cannot hurry. That's just asking for a fall."

She has a long list of activities she shares with friends and family. "I don't have much time to do nothing. This place where I live offers us plenty of activities."

Being 90 is just a number to Arlene. Sure, she has become limited due to vertigo, but she has great memories that she continues to accumulate. A family board in her apartment is filled with notes

and art work from her grandchildren.

"I was loved. That's very important in my life. My husband, he was so great," she said. "I'm joyful, especially in the morning when it's quiet, and I can do some praying. Joy comes in the morning."

She tries to eat healthy, opting for fried foods only in moderation and limiting sweets. "I avoid too much sweets, which I think is killing Americans," she said.

She attributes her good health and sharp mind partially to heredity. "I was very blessed to be tall, lean and very active."

Scientific advances have enabled us to live longer and recover from diseases that used to be automatic death sentences. No one knows just how far these medical advances will take us. Will we someday live to 125 or even 150? 200? Will we want to? Is aging just a disease we can someday cure? Will the Food and Drug Administration ever approve an anti-aging pill?

Someone reading this Senior Resources Guide just might be around to learn the answers to at least some of these questions.

For now, aging is a natural condition that occurs not with just every birthday, but with every waking moment. With aging comes new aches, pains and maladies. Our lifespan is limited, at least for the foreseeable future.

"You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old," explained comedian





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and actor George Burns, who lived to be 100.

"There are many people who recover from cancer, stroke or cardiovascular disease. But they continue to age, because aging is separate from their disease," said Leonard Hayflick, a professor of anatomy at the University of California in San Francisco in the medical website STAT.

According to Hayflick, human cells divide only 40 to 60 times before they must pause. Called the Hayflick Limit, it shows that even with wonder drugs, life does end.

### Don't Forget The Red Wine

Several years ago, ABC News asked centenarians — people who lived to 100 — why they believe they are still living strong and active lives after all these years.

A woman from Maine said she didn't retire until she was 90 and kept walking one mile every day. And don't forget that daily glass of red wine, she advised.

A woman from Texas, at the age of 105 continued to eat a plate of bacon and some coffee pudding every morning, according to her son.

Others interviewed credited their religious beliefs and exercise.

"Many more people who have the genetic makeup and environmental exposures that increase one's chances of getting to 100, but who would have otherwise died of what are now readily reversible problems, are able to fulfill their survival destiny," said Thomas Perls, a longevity expert and professor of medicine at Boston University in an AP article.

Genetics plays a large role in life expectancy. But that is not the only deciding factor by far. A healthy lifestyle matters greatly in determining how long you will live. One in some 55,000 people in the United States reach the age of 100 and that is not all related to heredity.

It used to be fairly automatic that with each birthday older adults celebrate, the frailer and sicker they become. Now, seniors are playing tennis, hiking and meeting new goals just like their younger contemporaries. Frail, hunched-over elderly seniors are much more a negative stereotype than actual reality.

According to the website CNBC, a daily regimen of managing stress, getting a good night's sleep, eating healthy, exercising and avoiding smoking goes a long way.

A positive, upbeat attitude also is



important.

The Social Security Administration has a life expectancy calculator. Go to <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/population/longevity.html> and list your birthdate and sex for an idea on what age you might reach.

You can also check out a similar calculator created by Perls. Go to <https://www.livingto100.com/> to get a feel for your life expectancy and suggestions to increase that age by changing some behaviors.

During an interview with BU Today, Perls noted, "[L]ife expectancy is highly correlated with socioeconomic status,

years of education, and access to good health care. For sure, there's a good chunk of our population that has all those things, and there's also many who do not, and it's the many who do not that bring that average down."

He noted that life expectancy in Hong Kong is about six years higher than in the United States, which he attributes at least partially to the number of people who smoke. Hong Kong has strict rules and educational campaigns against smoking as well as low numbers of smokers, according to Perls.

Many of the centenarians Perls studied

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were healthy well into their 90s. “These individuals have a long history of aging very, very slowly. And they do delay any kind of disability towards the very end of their lives. Some of them have aging-related diseases, but they are highly resilient. And if they do have any aging-related diseases, like cardiovascular disease or stroke, even diabetes, or some kinds of cancer, I would say those don’t cause a problem for them,” Perls said in the interview.

To reach your 90s and beyond while still being healthy, Perls recommends avoiding meat or having it once a week at the most. Don’t smoke. Exercise daily, and participating in a variety of activities including aerobics, balancing and strength.

Maintaining muscle and balance will decrease your likelihood of falling and ending up bedridden.

While Perls stressed the importance of daily exercise, he also noted that exercising three days a week is better than zero days a week. Eating healthy and in moderation also are good rules to follow. Rarely are those who live to be 100 obese, according to Perls.

It’s not stress as much as how people manage their stress levels that affects

longevity. Exercise, meditation, prayer, yoga and finding quiet and relaxing hobbies help keep stress levels to a minimum.

### The Role of Heredity

While genetics plays a large role, Perls explained our heredity can also aid us in living longer by alerting us to possible future health issues. If one of your parents suffered from heart disease, tell your doctor early on and strive to keep it in check. Most likely, your parent didn’t have the medical care and knowledge available now.

If family history includes colon cancer, get screened by the time you are 40. If there are incidents of breast cancer in your family, talk to your doctor about your options right away.

Another factor he points to is socialization, being around family and friends. Isolation has a negative affect and can lead to depression and poor medical health. Social isolation was all too common for many older adults during the global pandemic, and it very well may have worsened poor health for those who didn’t have COVID-19.

An article on the Geisinger website calls living to 100 “within reach,” noting,

“Research suggests our genetic makeup only accounts for 20 to 30% of our longevity. That leaves 70 to 80% to lifestyle choices – which means how you live your life can have a big impact on how long you live.”

The article points out there are no quick fixes. People need to eat healthy and exercise consistently for many years. The good news is that small changes go a long way to helping people live longer and healthier. A diet filled with vegetables and lean protein provides the nutrients needed to maintain and repair skin and eyes, according to the article.

“Avoid eating too many processed foods,” wrote Cybele Pacheco, a Geisinger family medicine physician. “They are often high in added sugar, saturated fat and sodium. Focus instead on eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean protein and whole grains.”

When it comes to exercising, the articles recommends everyone break a sweat. Don’t think marathon running or bicycling through the Alps. Rather get involved with consistent aerobic exercise to maintain a healthy body weight, manage stress and a healthy heart, according to the article.

The Department of Health and Human Services recommends 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five days a week. That could include walking, biking, swimming laps, hiking or dancing.

That should help keep you fit and add to cognitive function and overall well-being.

Reducing stress is not always easy, especially when life throws a curve ball. For some, that could be having an issue at work or with friends. For others, it could mean receiving debilitating medical news for yourself or a loved one.

Whatever the case, stress can take a large toll on a person’s body and mind. In small doses, from time to time, stress can be handled without lasting effect. When it becomes constant, it needs to be dealt with through various ways including meditating, practicing yoga, breathing exercises or seeing a therapist.

Find something to do that you enjoy, particularly a soothing activity, and that should help.

“Few things age a person faster than constant stress,” according to Pacheco.

Keeping your mind active is important as you age. Research has shown that doing mental exercises could help prevent

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Conceptual Rendering

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The Grandview is pending approval from the Maryland Department of Aging.







She stays social, sharing dinner with some ladies several times a week. They drink wine, but Betty only sips. "I bring a wine bottle, and I pour myself half a glass of wine, and I only drink half of it. I'm not really a drinker."

Her living facility consists of two buildings. She needs to walk down a long hall, take the elevator and cross over to the second building each time she plays cards, picks up her mail or goes to the library or dining room. She makes sure she does that several times each day.

According to a study by Johns Hopkins that followed 6,200 men and women for

eight years, those that stuck with "four smart behaviors" reduced their chances of death from all causes during those years "by an astounding 80%."

Those four behaviors are:

Don't smoke.

Maintain a healthy weight, which Johns Hopkins defined as a body mass index of less than 25.

Get up and move for about 30 minutes most days. Walking or engaging in other activities three times a day works. Johns Hopkins officials suggest walking 10 minutes in the morning, at lunch and then again after dinner.

Make healthy food choices by eating a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, tree nuts with healthy oils, fish, not much red meat, whole grain carbs and olive oil when cooking.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), adults 50 years and older who want to stay healthy should get moving, eat a healthy diet, pay attention to their weight and shape, don't smoke or use tobacco, keep their brain active and be good to themselves. That means getting enough sleep, staying in touch with family and friends and surrounding themselves with people they enjoy.

The NIH also recommended people get regular medical checkups and drink only in moderation.

According to the NIH, scientists have discovered ways to prolong the healthy lifespans of worms, mice and even monkeys. Could humans be next?

Scientists have uncovered clues about the biology of aging although the best way to increase your odds of living a long and active life seems to be – as mentioned throughout this Senior Resources Guide – eat well, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and stay away from bad habits.

Life expectancy has been increasing, while not as quickly as it has in the past. A century ago, people usually lived to be about 54 years. Now they are living into their late 70s and 80s. And the older and healthier people are, the better chance they will continue living longer and healthier.

Overall, older adults tend to be healthier than they have been in the past. Better habits, better medicine and better living conditions are credited.

"If I had to rank behaviors in terms of priority, I'd say that exercise is the most important thing associated with living longer and healthier," said Dr. Luigi Ferrucci, an NIH geriatrician who oversees research on aging and health. "Exercise is especially important for lengthening active life expectancy, which is life without disease and without physical and mental/thinking disability."

As we age, it is normal for our body to lose muscle, our joints get achy and our energy lessened. Often, this convinces people to exercise less and sit more. That is not smart thinking. The less active, the greater risk for disease, disability and even death, according to the NIH.

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Left to right, Derek Hawver and Diane Sahr, past Maplewood Co-op Board Presidents, Don Berlin, current Co-op Board President





If you are used to walking, swimming or playing tennis, keep it up. On the other hand, if it is painful to exercise, talk to a medical professional or what types of activity are best for your particular health and mobility range. Even frail, older adults benefit from regular physical activity, according to the NIH.

Another sure way to improve your chances for a longer, healthier life is to shed excess weight. "Being obese — with a body mass index (BMI) higher than 30 — is a risk factor for early death, and it shortens your active life expectancy," Ferrucci says. BMI is an estimate of your body fat based on your weight and height. Use NIH's calculator by going to [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose\\_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm) to determine your BMI. Talk with a doctor about reaching your healthy weight.

Animal studies have found that certain types of dietary changes—such as extremely low-calorie diets—can lead to longer, healthier lives. These studies offer clues to the biological processes that affect healthy aging.

"We have indirect evidence that

nutritional adjustments can improve active longevity in people, but this is still an area of intense research," Ferrucci says. "So far, we don't really have solid evidence about caloric restriction and whether it may have a positive effect on human aging." Researchers are now studying potential drugs or other approaches that might mimic calorie restriction's benefits.

According to Perls, the influence of genes is stronger for people who live to older ages, such as beyond 95. Perls has been studying centenarians and their families to learn more about the biological, psychological and social factors that promote healthy aging.

"It seems there's not a single gene that imparts a strong effect on the ability to get to these older ages," Perls says. "Instead, it's the combined effects of probably hundreds of genes, each with weak effects individually, but having the right combination can lead to a very strong effect, especially for living to the oldest ages we study."

He urged people to be leery of products promising quick fixes to aging. Hormone replacement therapy has not been proven

to assist aging, and may in fact cause negative side effects.

### We Don't Age At The Same Rate

Carmel Roques, Maryland's Secretary of Aging, explained there is not one straight course from life to death. "I think about longevity and aging. It is a very personal experience," she said. "We don't all age at the same rate. It's a biological phenomenon," she noted, adding, "We also know it can be shocking."

"The world is older than it has ever been" she said, referring to life expectancy. "To meet that challenge we have to think differently. We, all of us, are an older society."

It wasn't that long ago that people rarely lived long enough to collect Social Security. Now, people are living off those federal funds for 30 years, she said.

"While the secret to eternal youth remains a mystery, our centenarians have so much wisdom to share and life lessons to teach us," Roques said. "I encourage all citizens to appreciate, protect, and provide comfort and stability for this growing population, their caregivers, and families."

That is why society must refocus and think about older adults as an asset, rather than someone who needs lots of care. Governments and developers should work on providing affordable and accessible housing, including housing that also includes services.

"We are looking to change the narrative," Roques said.

Dr. Carstensen, during an interview on WBUR's On Point radio show, spoke of the upside of aging. Older adults tend to report fewer negative emotions and more positive ones than their younger counterparts. "People, the older they were, report on balance, better emotional experience," she said during the interview.

"[I]t isn't the fact that there aren't older people who are struggling emotionally, but there are many fewer of them struggling emotionally than young people," she added. "Older people have more mixed emotions. They're more likely to experience joy with a tear in the eye than younger people are. We see a kind of a savoring and an appreciation, that's what captures the emotional experience. It is not a uniform, simplistic, happy."

Carstensen attributed that partially to seniors changing goals and focusing more on the present as well as the stronger

likelihood that older people select their own environments and people with whom they interact. They aren't necessarily stuck with coworkers they don't enjoy or teachers they don't respect.

Older people bring a different perspective on things that affect them and are more likely than younger people to realize that bad times to often end, she said in the interview.

"We become aware of our own mortality as friends and loved ones die, as we recognize that life doesn't go on forever. And if there's a paradox of aging, it's that when we recognize the limitations on life, rather than become anxious and depressed, we savor," she said.

It is helpful to have a more joyful attitude as we celebrate more birthdays. According to a study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences by Stanford University biologist Shripad Tuljapurkar, the average age of death in those who live to be older than 65 increased by three years in every 25-year period. Therefore, he noted, people can expect to live about six years longer than their grandparents, on average.

That means retiring at an older age. In 1994, 27% of the labor force was between 35 and 44 years old. That age group is projected to make up 22% of the work force in 2024. In 1994, only about 12% of those 55 and older remained at their jobs. In 2024, almost one-quarter of the work force had already celebrated their 55th birthday, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Those older workers not only continue to be productive, but they also may serve as work-life mentors. They may pursue new hobbies, become authors or get involved in societal issues.

The good news for employers is that older workers take fewer sick days, were more likely to be highly satisfied than their younger colleagues and showed stronger problem-solving skills, according to research from the Milken Institute's Center for the Future of Aging and the Stanford Center on Longevity. ■

*This guide was written by Suzanne Pollak, senior editor/writer at the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington. Learn more about JCA at [www.accessJCA.org](http://www.accessJCA.org) or call us at 301-255-4200. Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AccessJCA> or Twitter at <https://twitter.com/AccessJCA>.*



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