

Living a Long, Healthy Life

On January 17, 2021, Betty White would have celebrated her 100th birthday. The actress, most well-known for her role as Rose in the sitcom *Golden Girls*, passed away peacefully on New Year's Eve after a very successful career that lasted over the span of seven decades – all while keeping herself active and healthy throughout her life.

The shocking news of White's passing, in combination with the start of a new year, has many people wondering what they can do to live as long as she did. Dr. Jeremy Carrier, an OSF HealthCare family medicine physician, discusses the important role that preventative care plays in staying healthy and living a long life.

Dr. Jeremy Carrier, Family Medicine Physician, OSF HealthCare

“Preventative care is an all-inclusive thing for many aspects when it comes to healthcare. Often, that's preventative screenings like lung cancer, colon cancer, breast cancer, cervical cancer. A lot of times those are of paramount importance for diagnosing and picking up some of those things early.” (:18)

Not only are annual screenings such as mammograms and colonoscopies a crucial part of preventative care, but other measures such as lab works, blood tests, and regular blood pressure checks can help you get a baseline and better understanding of your health – and will help determine if any part of your lifestyle needs to be modified to get you in the best possible position for continued wellness.

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“There is heart disease, the importance of blood pressure regulation, watching cholesterol levels, and other risk factors you can work with your doctor on adjusting or modifying – whether it be tobacco usage or whatever else.” (:14)

Family history also plays a big role in determining your risk factors for certain diseases and knowing your family history will help your provider come up with a health care plan tailored to your specific needs – including timing of screenings, frequency of visits to the doctor, and so on.

Diet and exercise also play big roles in your health and the earlier you develop healthy habits, the better. Shortly before her passing in December, White spoke with *People* magazine about her secret to a long, healthy life, saying: “I try to avoid anything green. I think it is working.” Instead, White was known to joke about opting for hot dogs and vodka as part of her diet. While much of that was said in a humorous manner, Dr. Carrier emphasizes the critical role that our daily choices do play in our overall health.

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“I saw the comment about how not eating greens was the secret for Betty White. But all joking aside, I think the best things you can focus on remain to this day, and have been for quite some time, are the importance of diet and exercise and lifestyle modification – that is still the bottom foundation of that pyramid. And I think a good, long-lasting relationship with your physician and going over and stressing the importance and reinforcing preventative measures such as screenings, immunizations, and risk factor reduction.” (:32)

Additionally, both health experts and White alike have been known to say for years that positivity, laughter, mind exercises, and staying active all aid in a healthy life. Another piece of advice that White lived by for keeping healthy included being kind to others. “Kindness and consideration of somebody besides yourself keeps you feeling young,” said White.

Dr. Carrier recommends people of all ages find a primary care provider that works best for them. Most importantly, do not wait until you are sick to see a doctor.

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“Sometimes I feel, just from experience too, that even though things might seem OK and you're not acutely having any symptoms or necessarily suffering from anything – that's awesome and we want that for you – but sometimes establishing with a doctor and walking through your healthcare together are some of the best, most productive visits. I think somewhat in part of the reasoning for that is a lot of times that gives us the opportunity to go over those preventative measures.” (:28)

If you do not yet have a solid baseline of your health, scheduling an annual appointment with your primary care provider is a good way to start your journey toward living a long, healthy life. If you do not have a primary care provider, find one at www.osfhealthcare.org. And in the words of White: “Don't try to be young. Just open your mind. Stay interested in stuff. There are so many things I won't live long enough to find out about, but I'm still curious about them.”