

Living well at 90

Mason couple celebrates richness of life

BY SANDY WEISKITTEL

It's a joyful day for Helen and Bob Fry, taking turns talking on the phone with their daughter, who has just relayed the good news that their granddaughter has delivered their first great-grandchild, a healthy boy.

Helen looks the part of a beloved grandma, with her welcoming smile, curly white hair and blue eyes sparkling intelligently behind silver-rimmed glasses. Her keen mind and ready sense of humor quickly convince those who meet her that life at 90 can still be interesting.

She and Bob, who is 92, recently went to a casino to celebrate their birthdays. "Our kids tell us no driving after dark, so we sneak home sometimes if we're out late for dinner," she says. "Our kids give us a lot of rules – but they're lenient," she teases.

Family is top priority for the Frys, and they feel fortunate to have their daughter and two sons within an easy drive of their home in Mason Christian Village. The Fry clan recently had a big party to celebrate Helen's 90th birthday.

As she relaxes in her comfortable recliner, Helen reveals some of her secrets of aging gracefully: 1) Live each moment to the fullest. 2) Don't envy other people. If you're worried about what the Joneses are doing, you can't be happy. 3) Do what you feel you like to do. 4) Help people where you see help is needed.

A recent online article posted by FEELguide (<http://bit.ly/age-traits>) notes six personality traits associated with longevity. Helen possesses every one of them:

- » Easy to laugh
- » Happy
- » Optimistic
- » Conscientious
- » Extroverted
- » Socially connected

Dr. Anita Saini, a Group Health internal medicine specialist in the practice that provides the Frys' medical care, agrees that the patients age 90 and older she sees in her office largely exhibit these traits.

She notes that good genetics have a lot to say about good health and adds that environmental and psychological factors also play important roles. Dr. Saini says a positive attitude has a big impact, especially in later years as family and friends pass away and a person loses degrees of independence, whether it's moving out of a cherished home or giving up driving.

Helen says that these days she moves a little slower than she'd like and her hearing could be a little better, but she still believes in living each day to the fullest.



After 66 years of marriage, Mason residents Bob and Helen Fry are still the best of friends. "We make our own highlights," Helen says. PROVIDED

She remembers when Bob's job took the two of them to Italy for four years while their kids were in college. "I could do anything I wanted. I took sculpting classes, went to the opera and took clothing construction from a Dior instructor."

The couple traveled all over Europe during that time, and a few years later they traveled around the world. "We've had a lot of nice adventures," Helen reflects. And she is happy to have shared them with her husband of 66 years: "Bob is still the best date I ever had."

Bob's health has slowed them a bit, too, in recent years. He lives with heart issues and diabetes. Helen makes sure Bob eats the right

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things, but “the diabetic diet is no fun,” she admits. Both of them see Dr. Jay Hayner, an associate of Dr. Saini at Group Health in the Mason Community Center.

Dr. Saini emphasizes the importance of seeing a primary care doctor, not just when you are sick, but as a means of staying well. Getting appropriate screenings at all stages can add years to a person’s life. “As patients age, in addition to taking care of medical needs, we also evaluate how well they are functioning with activities of daily living, and how safe they are in their environment, especially if they are living alone,” she says.

Doctors can check for depression, memory issues or other conditions that may lessen a person’s quality of life. “If an older person is having problems with strength or mobility, we usually get physical therapy for them at home. We also link patients to social workers who can help access resources in the community for patients.”

Helen feels fortunate that she hasn’t faced many health problems. “I’ve always been healthy.” She also notes that she’s always been happy.

“Life has been great,” she says. “We like what we did. We like what we’re doing.” The prospect of holding a great-grandchild is one more blessed moment to savor. ■

» TIPS FOR STAYING HEALTHY AS YOU AGE

Internal medicine specialist Dr. Anita Saini has seen a lot of people who have reached 90 and beyond during her 10 years in practice, and she’s seeing a lot more today than she did a decade ago.

“Most of my older patients who are independent are physically and mentally active, and they take care of themselves. They are motivated and wanting to be independent,” said Dr. Saini, an internal medicine specialist with Group Health, a TriHealth Physician Partner, in the Mason Community Center, 6010 Mason-Montgomery Road.

Based on her observations, Dr. Saini lists eight factors that strongly influence a person’s ability to live a healthy, happy life at 90 and beyond.

- 1. Genetics:** This is one factor we can’t control, but it plays a big role in conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Knowing your family history can help you get appropriate screenings for prevention or early detection of many diseases.
- 2. Positive attitude:** A good attitude toward life motivates people to take care of themselves and allows them to weather the negative effects of stress and adversity.
- 3. Eating right:** A well-balanced diet with plenty of vegetables helps you maintain a healthy weight and gives your body the fuel it needs to ward off illness. It is very important to remain adequately hydrated to avoid physical complications.
- 4. Exercise:** As your physical condition allows, Dr. Saini recommends 30 minutes of activity five days a week or more, plus strength training. “Strength and flexibility are more important the older you get. Use a resistance band, lift light weights or do yoga.” She also recommends exercises to help maintain balance, because the risk of falling increases as we age. A fall in later years can contribute to declining health and loss of independence.
- 5. Active mind:** “Being involved in social activities, reading, listening to music, talking with other people and solving puzzles are all excellent ways to maintain an active mind. Learning capacity decreases after age 70. Do new and different things to keep more nerves in your brain activated.”
- 6. Family and friends:** Dr. Saini says having good relationships contributes to a healthy mind and helps overcome feelings of loneliness or depression.
- 7. Avoiding unnecessary medication:** Manage minor problems with non-pharmacological treatment. For example, try heat, ice or rest for a minor injury rather than taking a pain reliever. Medications are important when needed, but can have side effects.
- 8. Seeing your doctor to stay well:** See a physician at least once a year to help prevent medical problems and manage any ongoing health issues. Regular eye exams and hearing evaluations are helpful as you age.

Your physician also can be a good resource to connect you with help for issues with strength, mobility, safety or other factors that affect your health and well-being. ■



Anita Saini

STAY ACTIVE

What’s out there for older adults to do? Here are opportunities for social interaction, exercising your brain, physical exercise, and having fun. Information: Call Mason Community Center at 513-229-8555.

MONDAYS

10 a.m. Beginning Bridge Lessons

12:30 p.m. Bridge (official play begins at 12:30 p.m. Players begin arriving and playing before noon. Come early to reserve a spot)

1 p.m. Mah Jong

1 p.m. Canasta and Other Cards

TUESDAYS

11 a.m. Picasso’s Painters

Noon. Duplicate Bridge

1 p.m. Canasta & Other Cards

7 p.m. Euchre

WEDNESDAYS

10-11:45 a.m. Bridge Topics

12:30 p.m. Bridge (arrive early to reserve a seat)

THURSDAYS

1 p.m. Daytime Euchre

1 p.m. Canasta and Other Cards

FRIDAYS

1 p.m. Mah Jongg

1 p.m. Canasta and Other Cards

SATURDAYS

4 p.m. Hand and Foot Canasta

Exercise

PICKLEBALL: A cross between badminton, tennis and ping-pong. Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 1 p.m.

FOREVER FIT: Exercise classes in a variety of formats, designed specifically for older adults. For specific times and classes, consult the drop-in schedule by clicking the “group exercise schedule” link at the bottom of www.imaginemason.org.

ADULT SWIM: Leisure pool swim time reserved exclusively for adults. Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to noon.