

## Fashion Week Uncovers More Than Just Clothes

Healthy Aging Month: Living Long and Well

Posted by [Third Age](#) on September 19, 2012 6:09 AM

By Maddy Dychtwald



Last week was Fashion Week in New York City, filled with excitement, glamour, and, of course, gorgeous models wearing the latest trends in fashion. Now that the clothes are all packed away and the reviewers move into high gear, I was struck by the fact that one of those gorgeous models was 81 year old Carmen Dell'Orefice. That's right. 81 years old and still walking the catwalk.

Although she may not look exactly like your average 81 year old, she's got silver hair and, according to one photographer she works with regularly, "she looks her age." As Carmen herself pointed out about her modeling during Fashion Week, "this may be a sign of the changing demographic times." It may also be a sign of our changing attitudes towards aging and what is considered "*old*" or over the hill.

In a world where Mick Jagger will soon be 70 and the fastest growing segment of our population is people over 85, most of us no longer consider 50 or 60 over-the-hill. In fact, according to the most recent studies that Age Wave has conducted, most Americans believe you don't really get old until age 75. And those individuals polled who were already over age 75 told us that "old" doesn't really begin until age 80. So maybe we're, once again, changing the chronologic number at which we begin to consider ourselves to be old. In fact, maybe that chronologic age will keep migrating towards higher and higher numbers...85, 90, 95...as we begin to clarify the key ingredients to a more ageless kind of aging.

Of course, we know aging is not just about how we look. Some people look youthful but are worn out inside, while others may have suffered from physical decline but feel vibrant within. And so, just as important as what we look like is how healthy and vital we feel and act. What happens when we roll back our surface appearance to view what lies below which can reflect itself in our overall health and vitality? For example, most of us know the obvious ingredients in

what I think of as ageless aging. We should eat a low fat, low cholesterol, low sugar diet, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, exercise our brains and manage our stress. [Phew! There's definitely a lot of maintenance involved in living a long life.] Being involved in the field of aging for more than 25 years, I try to live my life with a great deal of emphasis on just these things. One of my passions has become exercising every day, which is great for managing my weight, cardio-vascular health, muscle tone, and even my moods, but it puts a lot of stress on my joints and spine. In fact, I recently went to a chiropractor complaining that my left hip and lower back were causing me pain. He did a thorough exam [including x-rays], then told me that my lower back and hip looked like I was at least 15 years older than my actual age. So I might even look younger than my chronologic age but if I have the spine of a 75 year old, what does that say about my future health and vitality? Will I be able to continue to take part in the activities I really enjoy and that make me feel ageless?

Another indicator of ageless aging is our level of productivity and engagement. With so many of us over the age of 50, 60 and 70, many of us are beginning to realize that staying actively engaged in some form of work can bring us a lot more than a paycheck. [Although that paycheck is a definite plus, especially as many of us live longer than we ever expected.] In a recent Age Wave/Sun America Retirement Reset study, the majority of those polled told us that they don't expect to retire at 65. In fact, most people said they want to work until age 69 or later – maybe even trying their hand at a new job or an encore career. And when asked why, “engaging with other people” was a top priority.

At age 90, Betty White is a striking example of working well past traditional retirement age. Not only is she an attractive, vital, and active woman but she's involved in a decades long career, and at the top of her game. Plus, she's really funny. In an interview conducted by Chris Harnick featured in the Huffington Post earlier this summer, she said, “I don't get tired. I have a good energy level, I'm blessed with good health and love what I do for a living. That's a good combination. I'm a very lucky old broad.” Maybe some of it is luck, but doing something you love and staying active and engaged are definite markers of staying ageless. And keeping a good sense of humor helps, too.

So does trying new things. And interacting in meaningful relationships with people you love and care about. And staying flexible, both mentally and physically.

In fact, ageless aging is a composite of a variety of different ingredients. What I notice from watching Carmen Dell'Orefice walk the catwalk, Betty White hosting Saturday Night Live, Mick Jagger rockin' out, and my own challenges to age more agelessly is that aging really is a multi-disciplinary sport requiring a tremendous amount of strategic planning, cross-training, discipline and commitment to staying active, vital, involved and even making a difference. It definitely isn't for the faint of heart.