

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



**Department of Human Services
Division of Elderly Affairs**

RHODE ISLAND SENIOR BEAT

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DO WOMEN REALLY LIVE LONGER THAN MEN?

CRANSTON--- Women live longer than men... is it fact or fiction? For generations, we have debated this question with equal measures of humor, folk lore, sociology, and speculation, as well as detailed scientific analysis. According to the researchers and doctors at Hebrew Senior Life (HSL), an affiliate of Harvard Medical School, there is no doubt. Women live longer than men.

Women outlive men by an average of five years. The current lifespan for a man is 76 years old; for a woman it's 81. HSL notes that this 5-year gap represents the narrowest age difference in 30 years, (so it appears that men can approach this issue with increasing hope). The question is why; and it's not easy to answer.

Age onset for disease is one proven medical reason for the gap. Cardiovascular disease typically occurs in men between the ages of 50 and 60. Women are more likely to be affected by cardiovascular conditions such as stroke, heart disease, or a heart attack in their 70s or 80s.

One theory suggests that women engage in risky behaviors, such as smoking, at a lower rate than men. The World Health Organization has noted, however, that smoking is on the rise among women and that more men are actually quitting.

Yet another notion holds that the physical make-up of females is better at carrying out natural routine health maintenance to keep the body's cells alive. This is theory is still being researched.

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One historically expressed and totally debunked myth is that women live longer than men because they have less stressful lives. Does anyone still believe this ancient tale? As economic necessity and other evolving social phenomena have taken root, more women have joined, and will continue to join, the workforce.

For many women, the everyday challenges of a career, perhaps taking care of a family, even juggling caregiving duties for an older relative, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, is more than enough to generate considerable stress. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 66 million women are now in the workforce. Approximately 73% have full-time jobs and 27% work part-time. In total, women make up 47% of the nation's total workforce. Working women are vital contributors to the nation's economy.

Fact or fiction aside, Dr. Robert Schreiber, medical director of outpatient care at HSL, offers these common-sense suggestions for a longer life:

- Eat healthy diet, including plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- Quit smoking, or never start!
- Get regular medical check-ups and have your blood pressure and cholesterol monitored. If either is elevated, get treatment.
- Develop strategies to manage your stress levels. Stress can have a negative impact on your physical and emotional well-being.

You should also have a regular exercise routine and work to keep your mind sharp. Go for a walk. Take on a crossword puzzle, read, and stay connected to your family and friends.

Follow these simple steps and you could eventually join the men and women who gather every May during Older Americans Month to celebrate the Governor's Centenarians Brunch.

Senior Journal: The Senior Journal public access television program is produced by senior volunteers and adults with disabilities, and is sponsored by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA), with the support of Rhode Island Public, Education, and Government Access Television. The Senior Journal is broadcast on Sundays at 5:00 p.m., Mondays at 7:00 p.m., and Tuesdays at 11:30 a.m. over statewide interconnect cable channel 13 and Verizon channel 32.

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From July 21 through August 16, *Rhode Island Disability Law Center* will be aired. Paul Roberti of East Providence, program host and producer, interviews Raymond Bandusky, executive director of the Rhode Island Disability Law Center.

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The Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of programs and services for Rhode Islanders ages 60 and older and for adults with disabilities. Questions or requests for additional information on the issues of growing older in Rhode Island should be directed to: Larry Grimaldi, Rhode Island Senior Beat, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs, 74 West Road, Cranston, RI 02920 or faxed to 462-0503. Information may also be requested via e-mail at lgrimaldi@dea.ri.gov.