

PETS ON PLANES: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OR SHAM? PAGE 44

WEBMD.COM

WebMD®

JUNE
2018

THE
POWER
OF FAMILY
DINNERS
PAGE 29

5
TIPS FOR
FITNESS
SUCCESS
PAGE 14

THE RISKS
OF **ESSENTIAL**
OILS
PAGE 40

ADHD
IN ADULTS
PAGE 60

3
TAKES ON
AVOCADO
TOAST
PAGE 49

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH

**ANNETTE
BENING**

PAGE 34

FEATURES

34

Good Genes

Annette Bening opens up about her health advocacy work, her career and family, and the key to living a long, fulfilling life

40

Natural Doesn't Mean Risk-Free

Be aware of the dangers of essential oils

44

Pets on Planes: Emotional Support or Sham?

Flying with animals brings solace to some, but others see it as a nuisance—or worse



“I start and end with the craft—working on roles in the most authentic way I can.”



ACTOR AND HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE
ANNETTE BENING OPENS UP ABOUT
**HER CRAFT, HER FAMILY, AND
LIVING A LONG, HAPPY LIFE**

ART: STREIBER / AUGUST

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY | REVIEWED BY AREFA CASSOOBHOY, MD, MPH, WEBMD SENIOR MEDICAL DIRECTOR

A

nnette Bening is not just famous as a four-time Oscar nominee and longtime spouse of Hollywood legend Warren Beatty. She's also known for being politely—if firmly—guarded

about her personal life, even as she quietly works without fanfare to raise funds and further research for cancer and reproductive health.

Her reticence clearly benefits her craft, so successfully does she disappear into the skin of her many memorable characters. From her breakout film role in 1990's *The Grifters* to her latest star turn in *The Seagull*, which opened in U.S. theaters last month, she conjures women on screen who crackle with life, wit, rage, humor, and, yes, drama.

Bening's own character, however, is best revealed not through her acting but her actions. When the cameras aren't rolling she's a doting daughter to her elderly father and mother, who at 91 and 89, respectively, still lead active, independent lives in San Diego. She's a devoted wife and mom, too, protective of both her enduring marriage to Beatty and their four kids ranging in age from 18 to 26. And she's an advocate for health-focused organizations such as The Entertainment Industry Foundation and Planned Parenthood.

CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

"I've been put into the public eye because of my craft, which has given me the ability to shine a spotlight on issues," Bening says. "It's a great luxury

and honor to be able to do that. I try to do it judiciously."

Supporting fundraising efforts over the years for breast cancer research is one such judicious choice. "We all have friends, relatives, and people close to us who have gone through breast cancer. That's certainly the case for me," she says before adding: "All of the issues around women's health and reproductive rights are ones I feel very strongly about."

Family planning—when and whether to have children, having a safe pregnancy and birth, and receiving good postnatal care—is central to reproductive health, yet this umbrella term covers a wide range of health issues that can affect both genders. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), reproductive health refers to the diseases, disorders, and conditions that affect the functioning of the male and female reproductive systems during all stages of life. They include the diagnosis and treatment of birth defects, developmental disorders, low birth weight, preterm birth, reduced fertility, impotence, menstrual disorders, vaccinations, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), patient education, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) services, and more.

Bening has long supported Planned Parenthood, a nonprofit reproductive health organization with nearly 650 health centers across the U.S. In fact, the creative team behind her acclaimed 2016 film *20th Century Women*—whose storyline depicts two central characters visiting a Planned Parenthood clinic for a pregnancy test and a cervical cancer screening—partnered with the organization during script development to accurately portray these scenes, and they even donated a portion of opening weekend ticket sales to the group.

According to Planned Parenthood, its health centers have provided reproductive health care for more than 2.8 million American men, women, and young people—and Bening has disclosed how she was once one of them, relying upon Planned Parenthood as a young woman back in San Diego, before she hit it big.

"Reproductive health is a very important thing for us all to stand up for—not just women, but men, too," Bening says.

AGING WELL

Bening, who just turned 60, embraces her age, even as she acknowledges the obvious pressures in and out of Hollywood to combat it. "Aging right now, in the culture we're in? There are some crazy ideas out there, and a lot of pressure is put on women, and men, too," she says. "So everyone has to handle it in his or her own way. Certainly, as a public person it can be tricky sometimes. I don't think there's any moral high ground for anyone who does, or doesn't do, plastic surgery or fillers."

For her, acting trumps vanity: "I start and end with the craft—working on roles in the most authentic way I can. I've always been interested in trying to get across whatever is going on in the story through my own lens, at whatever age that I am. I want to be that age, and serve that creative purpose. That feels good to me."

Her performance in *The Seagull*, a period drama based on the classic Anton Chekhov play about a fading Russian actress who feels threatened by an ambitious ingenue (played by Saoirse

"AGING RIGHT NOW, IN THE CULTURE WE'RE IN? THERE ARE SOME CRAZY IDEAS OUT THERE, AND A LOT OF PRESSURE IS PUT ON WOMEN, AND MEN, TOO. SO EVERYONE HAS TO HANDLE IT IN HIS OR HER OWN WAY."



LONGEVITY LESSONS

Annette Bening, 60, doesn't fear aging. Perhaps she's so blithe about growing older because her **maternal grandfather made it to 100**, and her own active, healthy parents are just a decade away from achieving this same centenarian milestone.

Thomas Perls, MD, founder and director of the New England Centenarian Study, the largest study of centenarians and their families in the world, is also a principal investigator of the National Institute of Aging-funded Long Life Family Study. **He shares some of his pivotal findings on exceptional longevity.**

Healthy inheritance

Children of centenarians have approximately 60% reduced rates of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and hypertension, and 80% reduced overall mortality in their early 70s compared to their average birth cohort.

All relative

Siblings of centenarians have markedly increased rates of reaching age 100, compared to other people born in their birth cohort.

Pregnant after 40

Close to 20% of female centenarians had children after the age of 40, compared with 5% of women born in their same year, which suggests women who have children after the age of 40 have a four times greater chance of living to 100 or older.

Delayed menopause

The average age of menopause is 51. Women who enter menopause later than this average may have a decreased risk for developing age-related diseases.

Female factor

Women who live to be 100 greatly outnumber male centenarians. Perls' research suggests women may be better at living longer with chronic illnesses that men don't generally survive.

Mentally sharp

Alzheimer's becomes less common among centenarians relative to octogenarians (people ages 80 to 89 years old) and nonagenarians (people ages 90 to 99 years old). Centenarians, it seems, have a resistance to developing the disease.

Ronan), underscores this assertion; only a middle-aged woman—who truly looks middle-aged—could authentically inhabit the part on screen. “It was a dream come true,” she says of the opportunity.

Bening may not outwardly resist the years, but she does wear them well. The star attributes her slim physique and glowing smile to eating healthfully (with “a glass or two of wine in the evenings”), maintaining a positive attitude, doing lots of yoga (“I was lucky enough to be introduced to it when I was in acting class; its practice and study have been a huge gift in my life”), and inheriting a good set of genes.

And, boy, did she ever: “My mother’s father lived to be 100,” she says. With her own parents, Arnett and Shirley, both in or quickly approaching their 10th decade of life, it seems centenarians may run in her family. And Bening claims she’s learned many lessons about longevity from them.

“My parents are decent, loving, very good people,” she says. “They have a circle of friends and everyone takes care of each other. Both have a positive outlook. When health issues come up, they consult their doctors, get good care, follow instructions—and then they get on with enjoying their lives. They tend not to complain. They focus on the good.”

Bening’s odds of reaching a similar marker are increased because of her genetic inheritance, says Thomas T. Perls, MD, professor of medicine, Boston University’s School of Medicine, and international expert on epidemiology, the genetics of aging, and exceptional longevity.

“Most of us have the genetic blueprint to make it to almost 90 if we adopt good health behaviors,”

he says. “If you want to live beyond 90, there’s evidence from our study, and from other studies, that genes do play a role. There are many mechanisms that either slow aging or make someone age faster; so far, we’ve found more than 130 gene variations and combinations—called genetic signatures—that affect how we age, especially after 90. These signatures play an even stronger role in subjects age 105 and older.”

To increase your own chance of becoming a centenarian, Perls points to research done on a cloistered group of Seventh Day Adventists who shared marked longevity. “Smoking is the very worst thing you can do,” he advises. “Don’t drink much alcohol. Eat a vegetarian diet. Exercise your mind and body every day. Maintain a healthy weight with a body mass index [BMI] no higher than 27. Manage your stress levels. Create a strong social network. And, if you’re a woman, having your babies at age 40 or older, and without the help of fertility technology, is likely a marker of your reproductive system aging very slowly and not getting age-related diseases that impair fertility.”

Another longevity bonus, perhaps, for Bening? She gave birth to her youngest child, daughter Ella, who is now 18, at age 41.

THE BENING-BEATTY BROOD

When it comes to motherhood, the private star finally lets down her famous guard.

“It’s taught me everything about life and most of the things I value,” she says of rearing the Beatty clan. “I always wanted to have children, even as a little girl.

I was just baby- and kid-obsessed. I wanted five—and I came close! I feel lucky and blessed. A friend once said to me, ‘When you have children, the light goes on in the attic of your life and it never goes out. They’re always a part of you, your orientation to your world.’ And that is true.”

Her oldest child, Stephen Ira, a transgender man now in his mid-20s, is a vocal activist for LGBTQ rights and a blogger who publicly chronicled his transition during his college years. When asked how his journey of gender identity transformed not only her son physically and emotionally but also her own outlook and ideas about parenting, Bening both answers the question while demurring it in the name of privacy.

“I value it deeply,” she says. “As I value each of my kids’ journeys. When we start out we think we’re the ones who are teaching our kids. But you learn pretty quickly they’re the ones who are teaching you; they’re the ones who understand the world. I protect my children; I don’t talk a lot about specifics. If they want to speak about anything, well, that’s their right.”

With this gentle pivot, Bening shifts back to discussing acting. She names another upcoming project she’s excited about that comes out in September: *Life Itself*, a new film from the creators of the mega-hit TV series “This Is Us,” costarring Oscar Isaac, Olivia Wilde, Samuel L. Jackson, and Antonio Banderas. The story spans multiple generations and follows a tribe of interconnected characters in New York and Spain; she plays a doctor. And with the focus back on her reel life, her real life remains safely behind the scenes.

Search for the slideshow
18 Secrets to a Longer Life
at WebMD.com.



TOP: GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE LEFT: PICTORIAL PRESS LTD. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; MIDDLE RIGHT: UNITED ARCHIVES GMBH / ALAMY STOCK; PHOTO BOTTOM: GETTY IMAGES

Top left: Bening accepts the best actress award for *Don’t Die in Liverpool* at AARP The Magazine’s Annual Movies for Grownups Awards in 2018.

Middle left: Bening, Elle Fanning, and Greta Gerwig in *20th Century Women*.

Middle right: John Cusack and Bening in *The Grifters*.

Bottom: Bening with husband Warren Beatty at the 2017 Film Independent Spirit Awards.



“[MOTHERHOOD HAS] TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING ABOUT LIFE AND MOST OF THE THINGS I VALUE.”

