How to Live Long and Prosper

Septuagenarian singer Jeffrey Osborne shares his secrets to good health.

June 19, 2018 By Kate Ferguson

Last year, Jeffrey Osborne performed at the “Life: Boomers and Seniors” Expo at the Twin Rivers Casino in his hometown of Providence, Rhode Island. The event catered to baby boomers (individuals born between 1945 and 1965) with a focus on health and wellness as well as fitness. As the singer interacted with the men and women on the casino floor, who joined him in song, he shared a message with these music lovers: Watch what you eat and take care of your health.

“It’s hard for me to do these concerts and watch people walking in with canes who can hardly move,” says the 70-year-old singer. “People don’t realize that’s a result of their diet.”

Osborne grew up the youngest of 12 children—six sisters and five brothers. As his siblings became older, he watched them succumb to different illnesses. “I have only one sister left,” he says. “I have three brothers still living; the others either died from cancer or suffered from clogged arteries.”

In the mid-’70s, when Osborne was still part of the funk/soul group LTD, he temporarily became a vegan. “But it wasn’t cool then, and there wasn’t as much research at that time or great products like there are now,” he says.

Years passed before Osborne tried going vegan again. In August 2017, on his 28-year-old son’s recommendation, Osborne sat down with other family members to watch an exposé about the meat industry. The controversial documentary—titled What the Health— profoundly affected Osborne. “I did not know half of the things going on with the beef and poultry industries, and that just opened my eyes to so much, and that’s what started me. After watching the film, Osborne and his whole family decided to go vegan, which meant giving up meat and dairy and fish—even though Osborne grew up in a coastal city and loved seafood.

Now he and his family follow a strict plant-based diet. “It’s been incredible,” he says. “I feel so much better and have more energy, and I feel good. My bones and joints— everything—feels so good.”

According to a report about vegetarianism and health published by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, numerous studies show that those who follow diets rich in veggies enjoy better health than folks who regularly eat meat. These inquiries have shown that, specifically,

vegetarian diets contain nutrients, such as fiber, vitamins and phytochemicals, that can help to prevent cancer and heart disease, prevent and reverse diabetes, lower blood pressure, reduce one's chances of developing kidney stones, gallstones and osteoporosis, and decrease the frequency and severity of asthma attacks and the need for medications among asthma sufferers.

The report states that consumers aware of veganism and the negative effects of meat consumption associate ethical and sustainable lifestyles with well-being and wellness and want more meat-free products and substitutes for animal flesh.

Another report, "Top Trends in Prepared Foods 2017," notes that 6 percent of consumers in the United States today claim to be vegan, which reflects a jump from 1 percent in 2014.

Osborne, who celebrated his 70th birthday in March, credits being fit and feeling fabulous to his adherence to a vegan lifestyle. In addition, he's an avid proponent of drinking alkaline water, which is H_2O with a pH above 7. (Most tap water has a pH of 7, while a pH of 8 to 14 makes water alkaline.)

"I drink one to two gallons each day," Osborne says. "Before I start my day and head to the gym, I drink 32 ounces of alkaline water; plus, I take some with me." Despite some anecdotal evidence supporting claims about the health benefits of alkaline water, many nutrition experts caution consumers that there isn't yet any solid scientific proof about its advantages.

But Osborne is a believer. He switched to alkaline water about five or six years ago and even outfitted his home with an alkaline water machine. And when he travels, he packs a portable version of the device in a wheeled suitcase.

The singer, who says he has run every day since he was 18 years old, certainly looks healthy. "I work out five days each week. I'm up at 6:30 in the morning every day, and I'm in the gym for an hour and a half to two hours," Osborne says. "I've always stayed in shape."

Recently, he released his first R&B album in a decade, featuring all original songs. The self-produced LP is titled Worth It All and follows Osborne's previous albums consisting of covers of jazz standards and R&B songs. But what the R&B crooner, who is currently on a national tour, loves best is the excitement of performing in front of live audiences, which is why Osborne continues to play more than 100 shows each year.

In addition to staying active, a key component of Osborne's personal health plan is to spend quality time with his loved ones. A number of findings show that positive interactions with family and friends can help relieve stress and support heart health and improve psychological well-being and reduce wear and tear on the body and brain.

"Now I'm out on weekends and back home during the week," Osborne says. "That works well for me because I can still enjoy my family life, and I can go out and work when I want to. I just really love that."

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