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# How this 77-year old marathon runner maintains her record-breaking performances

by [Jessie Tu](#) | 1 week ago



**A**ge is no barrier to breaking athletic records for Jeannie Rice.

The 77-year old marathon runner has been running since her mid-thirties, consistently pounding over 80 kilometres of pavement each week for the last four decades. She does light weights three times a week, and has one rest day.

On Monday, the Ohio-native ran the Boston Marathon, placing first in her 75-79 age group. She currently holds the world record for every distance between the 1500 meters and the marathon, even beating the fastest men in her age group.

She also boasts the highest VO2 max (maximal oxygen consumption a body uses during intense exercise) of any woman aged 75 years or older. In fact, her VO2 max is comparable to that of world-class distance runners several decades younger. Does she have a secret?

“Training is 50 percent of it,” she recently told *Runner’s World*. “If I didn’t train, I wouldn’t be where I am.”

She regularly runs with friends in their 40s and 50s. “I forget how old I am, because physically, I can keep up with that,” she said.

She insists that she is not physiologically different, telling the magazine last month after competing in this year's Tokyo Marathon, "I'm just a normal, average person. I'm not any different than anybody."

"I don't do anything different, I'm just lucky and I'm blessed, you know."

The septuagenarian runner began running at the age of 35 in an attempt to lose some weight after a visit to her native country of South Korea.


"I figured if I jogged around the block, I'd lose five pounds right away," she recently reflected. "I was only running one or two miles at a time. I didn't even have running shoes."

It wasn't until she reached her 70s that she began accomplishing world-record performances — a time when most runners encounter substantial losses.

Last April, just days after she set a new age-group world record in the London marathon, Rice participated in a research project in England, where she underwent a series of assessments, including body fat measuring, treadmill testing, and other running and jumping tasks. Researchers were keen to find out whether Rice's training regime from decades of high volume running made any impact on her current performances.


Last month, the research was published in the Journal of Applied Physiology. The study's authors attributed Rice's high V02 max and high max heart rate of 180 to her long term training habits.





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Jeannie Rice, who turned 77 on April 14, has broken many world women's age group records. (Loughborough University)

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Today, I read a fascinating story about Jeannie Rice in the Washington Post. At age 77, she is still crushing marathons and redefining what it means to age with strength and purpose. Her remarkable fitness is inspiring researchers and runners alike. To me, it's her mindset that sets her apart:

"If you have passion and purpose, you can do anything."

Jeannie's story is a powerful reminder that it's never too late to achieve our goals —and that passion fuels health and longevity.

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They also surmised that one's VO<sub>2</sub> max can be maintained as age progresses by running relatively high mileage without a particularly heavy emphasis on high intensity exercise.

"The very high VO<sub>2</sub> max found may explain why the present athlete was able to achieve world-class performances across a wide range of distances (1,500m to the marathon) as VO<sub>2</sub> max is highly important across all middle/long distances," the study authors wrote.

"The study of master athletes, particularly at the world-class level, can provide essential insights into the ability of humans to maintain cardiorespiratory fitness with advancing age without the confounding effect of reduced physical activity, and on the training practices eliciting such maintenance."

One of the study's authors, Bas Van Hooren, said Rice "exemplifies how consistent training, and perhaps favourable genetics, can partly defy conventional aging processes."

The authors also attributed Rice's high performance to her lack of injuries — Rice has only had one running injury over the course of her decades long running career — a metatarsal fracture that occurred when she stepped on a rock, a few months after participating in the study.

"Her resilience to running injuries has likely contributed to her world-class age-group performance," the authors wrote. "As continuous years of running training has been suggested to be particularly essential for aging athletes."

“This seems to be due to a possibly more rapid decrease in physiological parameters with prolonged rest (e.g., due to injury) in older individuals, and subsequent reduced response to training as compared with younger individuals observed in some studies.”

Opening up about her lifestyle recently, Rice also attributes her performance to keeping a healthy and balanced food diet, including salads, fresh vegetables, rice, fish and nuts. She avoids fried foods and sweets and keeps hydrated.

“I feel as young as when I was 50,” she told *Surrey Live*. “I’d like to be doing this well into my 80s – that’s my personal goal.”

She is an inspiration to younger women, whom often approach her at races for a chat or photo. “It’s wonderful because they think I’m doing well because of my age,” she said. “I’m trying to motivate them, be an inspiration for them. They don’t know me personally, but they think, ‘If she can do it, maybe we could do it.’ That’s what I want them to think.”

*Image credit: Screenshot from FOX 8 News Cleveland footage*

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