“I won the Olympics when I was a teenager,” says 1968 Gold Medalist figure skater Peggy Fleming. “and I skated professionally for many, many years after that. In some ways, it was a difficult time for me. There aren't too many Olympic sports that require you to go out and perform for the next 30 years with people expecting to see Olympic quality performances every time. It's really hard to keep up your health and your craft so you always feel proud of yourself.”

By all accounts, Peggy Fleming is one of the icons of American figure skating; a vision of grace, beauty, athleticism and artistic creativity that has rarely—if ever—been equaled. But while her love of skating led her naturally to a career as a figure skating commentator for ABC Sports, she has had equal success as a health care advocate, an author, a California winery co-owner and most recently, a spokesperson for a coenzyme Q10 supplement company.

In an exclusive interview with Life Extension® magazine, Fleming talks about her life, her interests, her personal health regimen, and why she is working to create greater awareness of the benefits of CoQ10. >>
February 10, 1968. Figure skating gold medalist Peggy Fleming waves with the other winners on the podium at the medal ceremony of the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France.

Success on the Ice

Born in San Jose, California in 1948, Fleming was the second of four girls in a family that enjoyed sports and many other activities.

"When I was 9," she recalls, "we went skating for the first time and it was just magic. My sisters went on and did other things, but I kept competing in skating and I sort of evolved into a world class skater, winning the Olympics." On her way to Olympic success, she also won five United States titles and three World titles.

But Fleming leaves out an important element, one she may prefer to forget: in 1961, when she was just 12, the entire American figure skating team, including her coach, was tragically killed in a plane crash en route to a competition. Just seven years later, at the 1968 Olympics in Grenoble, France, Fleming stunned the world with her brilliant performances, putting American figure skating back on the map and leading to a worldwide renaissance of interest in the sport.

Choosing to go professional after winning the gold medal, Fleming notes, "My life after the Olympics is kind of like the battery that just keeps going and going, taking me in such great directions." In order to keep up with the exciting pace of her life, Fleming makes sure she takes excellent care of her body.

How Fleming Stays Healthy

"My health has always been very important and I've learned so many things along the way," Fleming comments. "For those of us who are getting older, there is a lot you can do to make a real difference in your health and help yourself age gracefully, while still maintaining the quality of life that you want."

Exercise has always been a vital part of Fleming's life and she continues her training today. "I think it's really important that people get out and do some form of exercise at least four times a week," Fleming advises. "Mine varies at times and is sometimes very intense." She says she often does a two-hour workout four or five days a week, including cardio, weight training or perhaps a yoga class to maintain flexibility and core strength. "It's so important because every muscle in your body supports another one, so you have to keep your strength up to do all the things you want to do."

Fleming says she also makes sure she eats right. "When you feed your body properly," she observes, "you really feel the difference. Being an athlete, I know how that works." She eats a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, some of which are grown on her property. "We have a lot of grapes, of course," she says, "and we also have a vegetable garden and fruit trees. I think eating fresh is really important, so I also go to a market that has wonderful fresh produce, fish and meat. We like to eat a wide variety of foods."

Fleming is only just beginning to discover the vast world of nutritional supplements, but she also mentions that she had an early introduction. "My mom had me drinking protein drinks when I was young," she says, explaining that she was so nervous before competitions that she was unable to eat regular food. "I think my mother was way ahead of her time. She found a way to make up this drink with protein powder—it tasted just awful and I would have to hold my nose to drink it, but it gave me the energy I required." Fleming credits her mother for figuring out what she needed nutritionally and finding a way to provide it for her daughter.

Today, Fleming takes calcium supplements for her bones and CoQ10 for energy, dividing the dose between the morning and afternoon. She came about using CoQ10 after concerns about a family history of serious health problems inspired her to research...
information on complementary medicines to help her heart. "My father died at 41-years-old from a third heart attack," she explains, "and my sister died nine years ago of a heart attack."

Once she settled on the supplement, she wanted to find the best form available, which is how she ended up becoming the spokesperson for the Kaneka Corporation of Japan. In 2006, Kaneka introduced a reduced active antioxidant form of CoQ10 called Kaneka OH Ubiquinol that is currently used by Life Extension®.

"Ubiquinol sparks 95% of the energy in your body," Fleming explains, "and you can totally feel the difference. You may have to wait for a few days to actually feel it, but over two or three weeks, you will experience a dramatic change."

In addition, she discovered that CoQ10 is known to have a positive interaction with statin drugs, which are commonly used to help lower cholesterol. "We’ve learned that statins block the body’s ability to convert CoQ10 to ubiquinol," she says. "So people who are on statins and are taking regular CoQ10 supplements might not be getting the benefits. You need the pre-converted form of CoQ10, which is ubiquinol, in order to get those benefits." For Fleming, those benefits are seen almost every day when she works out.

"I often have workouts around 4 o'clock in the afternoon," she explains, "and that’s the time when your body is kind of winding down and I used to feel tired. But now I take CoQ10 a few hours before my workout and it has definitely helped with endurance. It’s given me energy and I feel really good during the whole session." If it weren’t for her battle with breast cancer over a decade ago, however, she may not be as knowledgeable about her health as she is today.

**Overcoming Adversity**

Diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998, Fleming calls herself "an 11-year cancer survivor," stressing that she was fortunate to have early detection and successful surgery. In the years since, she has become a strong advocate for a healthy lifestyle and for public awareness of preventive care, appearing on many television shows including Oprah and 20/20, to encourage women to take responsibility for their health.

"Make sure you get your regular checkups," she advises women, "and do your breast self-exams and get mammograms every year. These are some of the things we can do to prevent cancer or to have early detection of the disease."

Fleming is also a spokesperson for the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

"I started out not knowing what bone density tests were," she tells us. "That was about 20 years ago. Now I get my bone density tests every few years and I’m still very strong and work to maintain my bone health and my total health."

**Advice For Better Health**

Seeing Peggy Fleming move with the same confidence and grace today as she did the day she won her Olympic gold medal is inspiring. Her endless energy is also admirable, but what stands out for most people is how youthful she looks—which begs the question: what’s her secret?

For starters, Fleming advises having a physical checkup every year and sharing your family history and health concerns with your doctor. But she also advocates taking an active role in your health by eating properly and exercising regularly. "I’m not asking you to be an Olympic athlete," she notes, "but just to concentrate on how you’re feeling and make sure your diet is fueling you properly." She adds that people need to do a self-assessment to find out if there are other things they could be doing to increase their energy and improve their health. Taking supplements would certainly be part of this program, as it now is for her.

"Heart health is the number one concern of people in this country," says Fleming, "so it’s something we need to pay attention to and participate in. We want to be sure our heart is healthy and our bodies are healthy and that we’re fueling ourselves properly. Taking supplements is something that definitely adds to your life and to your quality of life."

If you have any questions on the scientific content of this article, please call a Life Extension® Health Advisor at 1-800-226-2370.
Copyright of Life Extension is the property of Life Extension Foundation and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.