

19 February 2008

By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor

Mariam Amash
BBC

[This Is the World's Oldest Living Person: 120 Years!](#)

A Palestinian woman

Guinness Book credits as the oldest living person the American Edna Parker, born on the 20th of April, 1893 (thus 114 years, 7 months and 28 days old). Parker got her title in August 2007, after the death of the Japanese Yone Minagawa, 3 months and 16 days older than her. Parker was born on the same day as silent movie star Harold Lloyd. She lives in a retirement community in Shelbyville, Indiana, and unlike Minagawa, Parker still is still in good health and can walk. But because of the bureaucratic procedures, Guinness Book has many escapes, and this is one of them. Actually, the oldest living human could be an Arab Palestinian woman, Mariam Amash, an inhabitant of the predominantly Arab town of Jisr az-Zarqa, in northern Israel. Amash seems to have been born 120 years ago, and if confirmed, this would make her the oldest living person in the world. She is not very far from the world's absolute longevity record, obtained by the French woman Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997, aged 122. "Yes, I am the oldest person in the world. I eat, I drink, and I take showers. I hope to keep going for another 10 years," said Amash. Amash has 10 children, 120 grandchildren, 250 great-grandchildren, and 30 great-great-grandchildren, as her relatives said. The Israeli authorities were shocked by the age of Amash when the woman applied for a new Israeli identity card. They delivered the identity card based on a birth document given by the Turkish authorities ruling Palestine one century ago. Amash is of Bedouin descent and puts her longevity on her diet, that comprises a lot of vegetables. The woman is quite active for her age. She is a devout Muslim and made five pilgrimages to Mecca, the last one in 1990. "She rises every morning around five for prayers. She then goes for a walk and then spends most of her day with the family. She recognizes all of us. But my grandmother's long-term memory is fuzzy," said a grandson, Majid Amash, 46, an engineer. Amash is worried that younger generations abuse of alcohol. "They drink too much Arak (an Arabic alcoholic drink)," she said. The family has to submit documentation to the Guinness Book of Records so that the woman can be recorded as the world's oldest living person. So far, this has not happened. Japan holds the world record for average longevity, with about 28,000 persons aged over 100, a fact connected to the healthy diet and quality medical care. Japan has one of the longest average life spans, 85.3 years for women and 78.3 for men, and the world's oldest recorded man is a Japanese, Tomoji Tanabe, 111 years old, born on September 18th, 1895.