

Tips for a Long and Healthy Life

Learning about longevity and health from the world's blue zones

Dan Buettner, author of *The Blue Zones: Secrets for Living Longer*, spent 20 years visiting areas of the world with longer life expectancies. These areas have been called blue zones. He studied the way people who lived in these zones to discover the common factors helped them live a longer, healthier lifespan. If you're interested in living a long and healthy life, here are nine things you can work towards, based on Dan's research.

1. Move Naturally

People in blue zones regularly engage in physical activities throughout the day, such as walking, gardening, and cleaning. Many sit on cushions on the floor so they are getting up and down regularly. Their exercise is relaxed and natural, not vigorous and stressful.

2. Have a Sense of Purpose

Long-lived people have a sense of purpose in life. This is not about your job, but rather a sense that you have a life mission, a reason to wake up in the morning. Research shows that people who have clear life goals tend to live seven years longer and maintain sharper minds than people who do not.

3. Make Down Time to Reduce Stress

Everybody experiences stress in their lives, but people in blue zones create routines that help them relax and shed their stress. Examples of these activities include taking naps, engaging in prayer, having a happy hour with friends, or creating fun moments with friends and family members. Planning regular down-time is important to long-term health.

4. Eat Less

One of the first blue zones discovered was Okinawa. Okinawan elders say, "Hara Hachi bu" before eating. This means, "Eat until you are 80% full." Eating less is a well-known way to extend the lives of laboratory animals, so eat slowly and stop when you cease feeling hungry but don't feel full.

5. Eat More Plant Foods

The diets of people in blue zones are primarily plant-based, consisting largely of whole grains, greens, nuts, tubers, and beans. Western research suggests that eating 5-7 servings of fruits and vegetables daily helps prevent many chronic diseases. So, eating more plant foods is important to health.

However, all the blue zones were found in semitropical or Mediterranean climates where people don't experience extremely cold winters. People in cold climates typically eat more meat. So, depending on where you live, high-quality, organic, and preferably grass-fed animal products may be part of a healthy diet.

6. Use Alcohol Moderately

With the exception of one blue zone, the Seventh Day Adventists of Loma Linda, the long-lived people Dan studied drank alcohol moderately and regularly. They typically had 1-2 glasses of wine or beer daily, but this drinking was typically with friends and was part of a social ritual in which they were engaged with friends. There is also some research to suggest that one glass of high-quality red wine each day may have health benefits.

7. Be Part of a Faith-Based Community

Healthy centenarians everywhere were part of faith-based communities. They participated regularly in some type of worship service. Research suggests that attending some type of faith-based service four times a month can add 4-14 years to one's life expectancy.

8. Put Loved One's First

Long-lived people put family first. They get married and remain faithful to their partner (which can add up to three years of life expectancy). They spend time with children and grandchildren. So, if you want a longer life, find ways to spend time with family and keep your family close.

9. Find the Right Tribe

Long-lived people have social circles, friends they can turn to when they need help. Research suggests that having at least three close friends you could call on a bad day can extend your life by eight years. Research also suggests that loneliness is as bad for your health as smoking cigarettes. So, it's also important to create a social circle for a long life.

Additional Resources

The Blue Zones: Secrets for Living Longer by Dan Buettner
Live to 100, Netflix documentary featuring Dan Buettner
Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

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