

Celebrate

healthy living

2018 Week 7

What Can We Learn from Blue Zones?

Places in the world where people live longer and healthier, without medication or disability, are known as blue zones. Here, it is common to see people live to 90 or even 100 years old. In partnership with National Geographic, journalist Dan Buettner thoroughly researched and identified these five blue zones: Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia (Italian island); Loma Linda, California; Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula; and an isolated Greek island, Ikaria.

Why do people in these areas live so long and so well? The answer is simple — lifestyle. Their lifestyle includes a healthful diet, daily exercise, and a low-stress style of living that focuses on family, purpose, religion, and meaning. Simplicity seems to be a thread that runs through the lifestyle of those living in these blue zones. Let's take a look at the lifestyle characteristics more closely.

What does a healthy diet look like in blue zone regions? Their diets are loaded with vegetables, fruits, fish, and nuts. They eat very little meat, sugar, fat, and processed foods. They do enjoy red wine, along with goat's milk and local teas as beverages. Studies show that heart disease and diabetes are linked to a lifetime of obesity and poor diet. People in blue zones eat healthfully most of the time and, not surprisingly, they suffer from these major diseases less frequently or not at all.

Another common theme across all blue zones is a daily routine of exercise. You won't see treadmills or fitness centers in these places, however. Those living in blue zones don't need to artificially incorporate exercise into their lives. Their physical activity is built naturally into their environment and into daily living. People climb mountains and walk through hills, they work the land, and generally use their bodies to do all of their daily activities. Often, their exercise is slow and relaxed, but ongoing. Their bodies are tough and healthy. Even in their 90s, they are often able to live active, normal, healthy lives and most are free from needing medication. Quite a contrast to those in their 90s in most parts of America, who are often frail, weak, and dependent on medications. The takeaway here is that you have to work your body every day and avoid long periods of sitting.

continued on page 2

In this issue:

What Can We Learn from Blue Zones?

Strengthen and Stretch Your Upper Body

Taming Your Sweet Tooth

Recipe: Lemon Raspberry Frozen Yogurt

Coming next week:

Improving Balance

Manage Stress with Guided Imagery

Balanced Nutrition

Recipe: Grilled Steak Salad and Baked Parmesan Tomatoes



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This newsletter developed by Sharolyn Flaming Jackson, Extension Specialist – Family and Consumer Sciences, K-State Research and Extension.

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Blue Zones continued

Those in blue zones also live a life of low stress and one that is filled with happiness. This is what most people want, right? Another theme of blue zones is that people live low-stress, happy lives enriched with strong family ties, a sense of purpose, a healthy dose of spirituality, and they get plenty of sleep. Just how they manage this, specifically, is hard to define. You can grasp the point, however, and that is if you are generally happy with your place in life then you behave in ways that promote longevity and health. In simple terms — you are most likely to take good care of yourself. Research has proven that living a life constantly full of stress, anger, and resentment has long-term, dramatic, and negative impacts on health.

Living a long and healthy life like those in the blue zones is not achieved through shortcuts and quick fixes. It is a way of life. It requires a constant, daily lifestyle of positive enrichment for the body and mind. You can take the lessons learned from a blue zones lifestyle and begin to apply them in your own life immediately by changing your perspective. Find ways to make healthy food taste good. Incorporate exercise and activity throughout your day as part of your daily routine, rather than it being a burdensome chore you do for 30 minutes each day. Surround yourself with others that share your interest in living a happy, meaningful life with less stress and place your priority on getting good sleep. There are lessons to be learned from the lifestyle characteristics of people living in blue zones. Try applying those to your own life as best you can.

Taming Your Sweet Tooth

Do you crave sugar? Sugar is hidden in many of common foods, and the more you consume, the more sugar you want to have. By eating or drinking highly sweetened products, you become desensitized to sweetness in your foods, so it takes more sugar, or more intense sweetness, to satisfy your desire.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend getting no more than 10 percent of your daily calories from sugar, or roughly 50 grams. To put things into perspective, drinking more than one 12-ounce can of soda would max out your limit for a day. The American Heart Association recommends about half that amount. The reason for these limits is that studies show a diet with a lot of sugar increases your risk for developing heart disease, and it can lead to obesity and associated diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cancer. This limit applies specifically to added sugars and not those occurring naturally in foods like fruits and milk.

For many Americans, this is a significant change and to reach this requirement of no more than 10 percent of daily calories, most people would need to cut added sugars in their diet by half.

It is not always easy to find the added sugars in foods and beverages. The best place to look is the ingredient label on processed foods. Look for these names: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, malt sugar, raw sugar, honey, high-fructose corn syrup, fruit juice concentrates, molasses, sugar, syrup, and sugar molecules ending in “ose” (dextrose, glucose, sucrose, etc.)

There are simple things you can do to start reducing the added sugars in foods/beverages you consume and begin to tame your sweet tooth.

- Start with beverages. Drink more water or unsweetened tea and choose these with a meal. Buy sugar-free or low-calorie beverages. Avoid, or limit, beverages with sugar substitutes. Consuming intensely sweetened beverages can leave you craving foods/drinks with more sweetness.
- Remove sugar, syrup, and honey from the table so it is out of sight.
- Add fresh fruit to cereal or oatmeal instead of sugar.
- Avoid canned fruit packed in syrup or heavy syrup. Choose those canned in water or natural juice.
- When baking cookies, brownies, or cakes, cut sugar in the recipe by 1/3 to 1/2.
- Use spices to enhance foods, rather than sugar. Try ginger, allspice, cinnamon, or nutmeg. You can also use extracts instead of sugar, such as almond, vanilla, orange, or lemon.
- Substitute equal amounts of unsweetened applesauce for sugar in recipes.
- Use sugar substitutes in moderation. If you are one that likes to have a dessert at the end of a meal, adopt the habit of serving fruit rather than high-calorie, high-fat, and high-sugar foods. This frozen yogurt (recipe on next page) is a treat.

Strengthen and Stretch Your Upper Body

Most of you are familiar with pushups. This staple exercise activates what are called the “push” muscles. Your bodies also have “pull” muscles, those in the back and posterior shoulders that pull your shoulders down and back.

Many of the activities you do activate the push muscles, such as desk jobs and using a computer, cooking, driving, texting, talking on the phone, painting, sewing, and writing, to name a few. Any activity you do with a slouched posture also uses these muscles. Most of us need to concentrate on exercises that activate our pull muscles so body strength is balanced.

Concentrate on adding an exercise or two for your pull muscles this week, such as a pull across the chest with tubing or a fitness band, or any exercise where you pull your arms back and try to squeeze your shoulder blades together. This exercise, Bent Over Row, can be done standing or while seated in a chair.

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly bent, holding a dumbbell. Bend forward at the waist about 8 to 10 inches, or as far as you feel comfortable, keeping your back straight. Extend arms about 10 inches in front of you so they are directly under your chest, with your palms facing each other.
2. Pull the dumbbells up and back toward your chest, keeping your elbows tucked close to your body.
3. Pause for a moment while squeezing your shoulder blades together.
4. Slowly lower the dumbbells back to the starting position.



Bent Over Row

More strengthening exercises can be found at walkkansas.org.

A good stretch for your shoulders is the Deltoid Stretch. Bring your right arm across the front of your body. Hold your right elbow with left hand. Gently flex the bent arm, which will pull the right arm across chest until a stretch is felt in the back of the shoulder. Hold for 15 seconds. Relax and switch arms.

Here are more resources for stretching your upper body:

[Upper Body Stretches for the Workplace](#)

[Stretching Exercises to do at your desk](#) or while you sit to watch television, etc.



Deltoid Stretch

Lemon Raspberry Frozen Yogurt

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 cup fat-free plain Greek yogurt (can also use vanilla Greek yogurt)
- 12 ounces frozen raspberries
- 1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 teaspoon fresh lemon zest
- 3 tablespoons honey



Directions:

1. Add Greek yogurt, raspberries, honey, lemon juice, and zest to a blender or food processor and blend until smooth.
2. Serve immediately or place in an air tight container and put in freezer for 1 to 2 hours, then serve.

Nutrition Information per 2/3-cup serving:

- 80 calories
- 0 g fat
- 18 g carbohydrates
- 5 g protein
- 4 g fiber
- 15 mg sodium