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Will You Live to 100?

Stack the deck in your favor with nine secrets from the Blue Zones.

In general, humans are living longer than they ever have. But in certain areas of the world, known as “Blue Zones,” clusters of people are stretching the limits of longevity.

We’re not talking about people who have traded time for quality of life. These are vibrant, healthy individuals who are living past age 100.

What Is a Blue Zone?

The term Blue Zones was first used in the early 2000s by Michel Poulain, a Belgian demographer, and Gianni Pes, an Italian physician. Their research pinpointed the area with the most male centenarians—the mountains of Sardinia, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. The men used a blue pen to circle the location on a map, and the term Blue Zones was born.

Intrigued by this age-defying population, explorer and National Geographic fellow Dan Buettner selected a team of epidemiologists, physicians, nutritionists, anthropologists, and demographers and set out on a global quest to identify other areas with above-average life expectancies.

Buettner and his team interviewed elders around the world who were defying the longevity odds to understand what they had in common.

Nine Keys to Long Life

In addition to Sardinia, Buettner’s team identified four other locations that fell into the definition of Blue Zones:

- The island of Okinawa, Japan
- The Greek island of Ikaria

- The Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica
- Loma Linda, California, home to a group of Seventh Day Adventists who live 10 years longer than the average American.

While the lifestyles of these communities varied slightly, Buettner’s team documented nine life-extending behaviors that they all shared. Even though you may not live in a Blue Zone, you can potentially prolong your life by implementing some of the behaviors from the people who do.

1. Plant-Based Diet

People in the Blue Zones typically eat a whole-foods, plant-based diet. They consume lots of fresh fruit, vegetables, and legumes. They rarely eat meat and fish and almost never drink cow’s milk. Buettner, executive director of the 2023 Netflix documentary series, “Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones,” told PBS NewsHour correspondent John Yang: “The number one killer in America is our diet. We lose about 660,000 Americans prematurely to the way we eat.”

2. Stop Eating Before You’re Full

Americans often eat quickly, on the run, and more than we need, which causes weight gain and all the issues that come with it. Okinawans follow Confucius’s mantra to stop eating when they are about 80 percent full. Others in the Blue Zones tend to eat their biggest meals at midday.

3. Imbibe

Except for the Adventists, most adults in the Blue

Zones drink alcohol, usually wine, in moderation (one or two glasses a day).

4. Stay Active

People in the Blue Zones don't typically run marathons or lift weights. They move naturally in ways that don't stress their joints. Similar types of exercise would be walking the dog, mowing the lawn, and biking to work. The idea is to get moving and keep moving.

5. Relax

Stress is part of life, but people in the Blue Zones take time each day to escape it. Constant stress causes chronic inflammation, which leads to age-related diseases, so do what you can to de-stress.

6. Follow Your Heart

People who live the longest often have a deep sense of purpose—a reason for getting out of bed every morning—which may add up to seven years to a life.

7. Keep the Faith

Many centenarians belong to a faith-based community. Buettner's research found that attending services four times per month added up to 14 years to life expectancy.

8. Put Loved Ones First

Caring for children, committing to a life partner, and keeping aging parents nearby is something people in the Blue Zones have in common, which likely fuels their desire to live long and full lives.

9. Positive Influences

Most centenarians surround themselves with people who support healthy behaviors and who encourage them to stay active, eat right, and enjoy life. 🍷🍷

READ MORE "Blue zones: Lessons from the world's longest lived" by D. Buettner and S. Skemp, *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* • "Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones," PBS.org, 12/23/23 • "Power 9—Blue Zones" by Dan Buettner, www.BlueZones.com

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