

Common Traits of Longevity

By Kate McCarthy

They say that it is the little things that matter most in life. That is true especially when talking about the secrets of longevity. Apparently it is the small details of daily living that add up to a healthier and longer life. That is what the people at National Geographic discovered when they tried to explore the secrets of longevity among various people and cultures. While looking for the common traits in lifestyle among the longest living people on the planet, they discovered certain similar practices which could be considered a formula to living a longer life.

There are areas of the planet where people tend to enjoy longevity. People there reach the age of 100 at extraordinary rates and reach these ages enjoying amazing health and strong cognitive capabilities. The places have been geographically and demographically defined as the Blue Zones. Blue Zone places like Greece, Nicaragua and Japan can teach the rest of the planet how to live a long and healthy life. In the book, "The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest", Dan Buettner maps out some common traits shared by these groups of people.



What do the longest living people in the world have in common?

Lifestyle of Food

Diet is key to longevity. Those who live in the Blue Zones share the same foundation in their diets. They all get the bulk of their protein from beans rather than meat. High consumption of proteins from animal products can increase mortality levels by 70% and greatly increase the risk of getting cancer. The Blue Zone centenarians eat beans, grains, fresh fruits and vegetables on a daily basis and enjoy small amounts of meat only a couple times a month. They also drink a little wine daily which brings high levels of polyphenols and antioxidants into their diets. They live much longer than average with just a fraction of the current rate of dementia in their elderly years.

Lifestyle of Motion

People who live to the age of 100 and older are engaged in physical activity throughout their lives. They don't actively take part in exercise like per se but their lifestyles are set up so they are constantly in motion either through walking, gardening or doing household chores, mostly without the aid of modern conveniences. Their daily chores keep them fit because they do them the old fashioned way: walking to the stores instead of driving, kneading bread instead of buying it sliced and packaged, planting, watering and weeding a vegetable garden.... These daily tasks create unconscious physical activity which carried out over a lifetime leads to a fit and healthy body.

Lifestyle of Purpose

Having a sense of meaning or purpose in your life can add up to 7 years to the average lifespan. The people living in the Blue Zones focus on family and relationships. They live with or near their adult aged children and help raise their grandchildren. They are deeply involved in the daily lives of their family because they all live, work, eat and play together. Having a deep sense of purpose and involvement with the people you love adds years to a lifespan.

Lifestyle of Community

Those living in the Blue Zones have a real sense of belonging to their community. They share a commitment to social network that they have built over a lifetime. Most live in a village setting with people they grew up with and have known for years. The concept of being lonely, which can take 8 years off average life expectancy, would be hard for them to understand. In addition the bulk of the centenarians are involved in a faith

based group of some kind. A deep religious faith and connection to other faith based people can add up to a decade in life expectancy.

Taking a lesson from lifestyles found in the Blue Zones and adapting them to our daily lives can be a challenge but is well worth the effort. Aging cannot be helped but how you live as you age can make an amazing difference in the quantity and quality of the years you enjoy.

Sources:

"Here are the Secrets to a Long and Healthy Life" by Simon Worrall, National Geographic. April 12, 2015.

"The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest" by Dan Buettner. National Geographic, 2009.

"Top Lifestyle Changes for Older Adults to Live a Longer, More Enjoyable Life" by Derek Jones, April 4, 2016.



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