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## Living Longer and Happier: The Nutritional and Spiritual Bases

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**Abstract:** After analysing the lifestyle of people living in Blue Zones and their longevity up to 100 years, the author concludes that moderation in food and a spiritual basis for life can lead us to a healthier and happier lives. For a healthy and happy life, she pleads for moderation in food and spiritual basis for life. Such nutrition combined with spirituality fosters physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

**Keywords:** Centenarians, Longevity, Moderation in food, Spiritual Basis

A handful of small towns have remarkable longevity. What is it about their lifestyle that can increase your chances of living to 100? Five locations – Nicoya in Costa Rica, Sardinia in Italy, Ikaria in Greece, Okinawa in Japan and Loma Linda in California – are scattered in different corners of the world and could not look more different. One unifying factor of these five cities is their longevity. In these Blue Zones people's chances of living to 100 years old are ten times higher than the US average of less than 1%.

The term Blue Zone was coined by the Italian epidemiologist Gianni Pes and the Belgian demographer Michel Poulain, who investigated rates of mortality in Sardinia, according to a BBC report (Robson 2020). Many scientists have continued their research into the Blue Zones, with many interesting hypotheses about what might explain the longevity in these regions.

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## Vegetarian and Moderate Diet

The first is diet. Particularly in the past, many people in the Blue Zones tended to eat in moderation. In Okinawa, for example, the elderly people follow the ancient rule of “Hara hachi bu” – eating only until the stomach is 80% full. And this seems to slow ageing (Robson 2020).

Long-term animal studies by Rozalyn Anderson, who researches metabolism and ageing at the University of Wisconsin, have shown that macaques following similar “calorie restricted” diets and have a markedly lower risk of age-related diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. They even look younger – the macaques’ fur took longer to turn grey, for example.

Besides being fairly frugal, the diets in the Blue Zones are mostly vegetarian, which can contribute to greater heart health (Buettner & McLain, 2019).

Some other unique quirks can also give us some hints at the secrets of exceptional longevity. For instance, on the Greek island of Ikaria, the population is known to drink a few cups of tea and coffee a day, and this seems to be associated with reduced cardiovascular disease in the region. Greek coffee is regarded as healthy for the body since it releases polyphenols, known as chlorogenic acids, which reduce inflammation throughout the body.

Combined with a moderate, low-calorie diet, caffeinated drinks may contribute to a longer and healthier existence. Like the food in Okinawa and Sardinia, the diet in Ikaria is notably low in meat and high in fresh fruit and vegetables (Robson 2020). Similarly, the exceptional longevity of Okinawa’s residents has generated lots of interest in two of its most common ingredients: the sweet potato and the bitter melon – that may have life-extending properties.

## Spiritual Basis

In addition to their eating habits, of equal importance are the social lives these centenarians enjoy: the people in the Blue Zones tend to live in highly integrated communities. It is now well accepted that a sense of social connection helps to reduce the effects of stress, while the responsibility of maintaining those friendships encourages greater

overall mental and physical activity. In one meta-analysis, Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a psychologist at Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah, found that the quality of our relationships is as important to our health as physical exercise or nutritional or moderate diet (Robson 2020).

Religion offers one important source of social connection in the Blue Zones. The people of Loma Linda are mostly Seventh-Day Adventists, for instance, while the Nicoyans and Sardinians are Catholics, the Ikarians are Greek Orthodox, and in Okinawa, the locals practice the Ryukyuan religion.

In addition to the social connection they can provide, religious practices, including many spiritual activities, offer “a sense of purpose to life, and offer solace during upset, which together are thought to add between one and five years to believers’ life expectancy” (Robson 2020). The awe we experience in nature may also have similar benefits.

## Conclusion

Exceptional longevity of the Blue Zones can not be restricted to a single magic ingredient. eating moderately with plenty of fruit and vegetables, exercising plenty, drinking coffee and tea, and finding space for spiritual solace are things that we can all build into our daily lives. That takes us to fulfilling and happier lives.

## Reference

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