



## How to Live Longer

Is there a formula for longevity? Researchers are looking for clues in the “blue zones,” locations around the globe where people live measurably longer than in the rest of the world. Explorer and author Dan Buettner and teams of scientists identified some of these longevity pockets and traveled there to examine the lifestyle characteristics that may contribute. Buettner’s book *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who’ve Lived the Longest* (National Geographic 2008) details their experiences with vibrant and healthy elderly people in the blue zones.

Mary Monroe, a freelance writer in Los Angeles, summarizes some of Buettner’s findings and how they can help you live a longer, better life.

### A Blue Zone Example

The four blue zones identified in Buettner’s book are Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; the Nicoya Peninsula of Costa Rica; and Loma Linda, California.

What are the blue zones like? Behaviors that Buettner and the researchers found in common in these blue zones are listed in the sidebar “9 Tips for Longevity.” As an example of one blue zone, consider the

Nicoya Peninsula community in Costa Rica. Buettner reports that, per capita, Costa Rica spends only about 15% of what America does on health care, yet its people appear to live longer than anyone else on earth. Centenarians here have a strong sense of purpose, family and community, and most have enjoyed hard physical work throughout their lives. They spend regular time in the sun and eat light dinners and a traditional diet of maize (corn) and beans.

### Your Personal Blue Zone

“The secret to longevity, as I see it, has less to do about diet—or even exercise—and more to do about the social and physical environment in which you live,” says Buettner. “People in the blue zones live rewardingly inconvenient lives. They walk to the store, to church and to their friends’ homes. They do their own yard work, hand-knead their own bread dough.”

The bad news is that, in reality, for most of us not living in blue zones, our chances of living to 100 are still quite small. Lessons from the blue zones may well be as much about the quality of years as quantity. Much of the aging process is, after all, a mystery.

However, Buettner believes that you can make changes in your environment to create your own “personal blue zone” to promote health and longevity. He emphasizes that his goal isn’t to force unrealistic expectations on people who don’t live in blue zones, but rather to encourage gradual “big-picture” lifestyle changes that will foster healthy habits like daily movement, natural and moderate eating, purpose-driven living and more social connection.

### 9 Tips for Longevity

Based on the habits of blue zone populations, Buettner identifies nine lifestyle characteristics that may help you live a longer, healthier life:

1. Make regular activity intrinsic to your daily routines.
2. Have a “Plan de Vida,” i.e., a mission or purpose that gives meaning to your life.
3. Take your life out of the fast lane: work less, slow down, rest, take vacations.
4. Eat less by following the “80% rule.” (Stop eating when you’re 80% full.)
5. Shift your diet to more vegetables and fruits, less protein and fewer processed foods.
6. Drink red wine in moderation.
7. Create a healthy social network.
8. Cultivate spiritual or religious beliefs and participation.
9. Make family a priority.

“We see from the blue zones and aging research in general that these behaviors are associated with longer life—and the same things that can help get you to a healthy 90 or 100 can get you there better,” says Buettner. “They don’t just add years; they’re vital, enriching years.”

For more information on ongoing blue zones research and longevity-related projects and programs, see [www.bluezones.com](http://www.bluezones.com). ■

#### Reference

Buettner, D. 2008. *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who’ve Lived the Longest*, Des Moines, IA: National Geographic.

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