

HEALTH & FITNESS

9 Things Centenarians Do Regularly That Promote Longevity



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by [Rebecca Parsons](#)



Blue zones, a term coined by best-selling author and researcher Dan Buettner, refer to regions with the longest-living people. Buettner set out to find corners of the globe with the highest numbers of centenarians, and after years of research, he identified five: Ikaria (**Greece**), Loma Linda (**California**), Sardinia (**Italy**), Okinawa (**Japan**), and Nicoya (**Costa Rica**). After pinpointing the five regions, he immersed himself in their cultures. Upon deep study

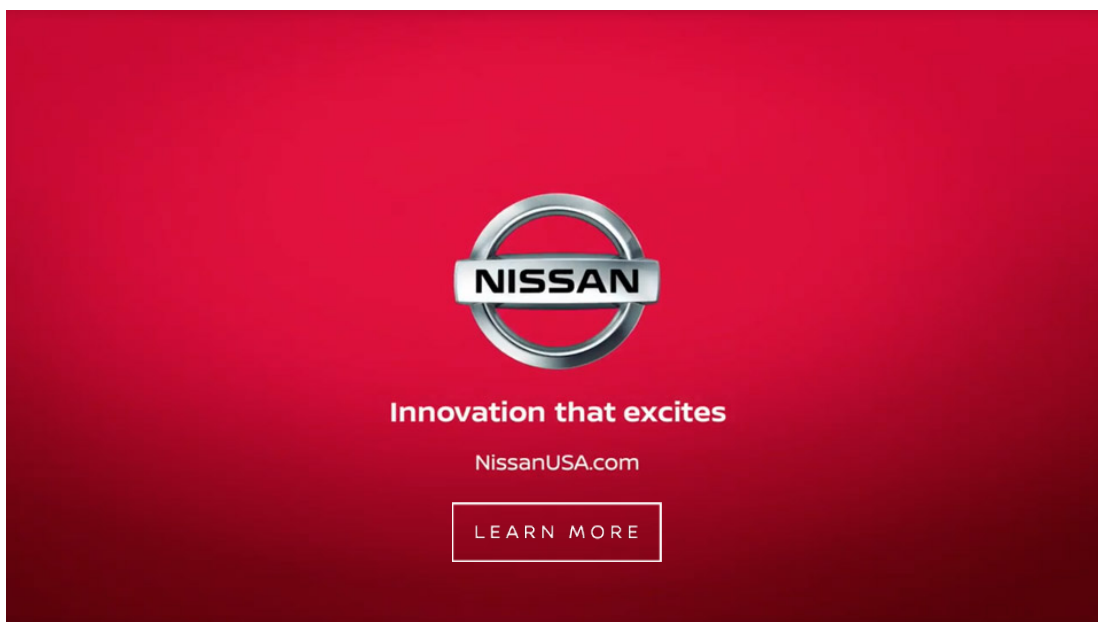
of the regional lifestyles, he discovered nine common factors that he believes hold the secret to longevity. While lifespan is still largely dependent on genetics, here are nine practices that have the potential to extend your years.

Home to the World's Longest-Living People: These Are 'Blue Zones' »

Move Naturally

When we think of meeting our daily exercise quota, we typically think of **hitting the gym** or lacing up shoes for a **morning jog**. However, the world's longest-living people do not actively incorporate exercise into their lives. It is simply a part of their daily living. They walk to the store, work in their gardens, and make meals by hand, tallying up a significant amount of movement each day without having to think about it.

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Have a Sense of Purpose

Across the board, blue-zone inhabitants have a strong sense of purpose outside their work. The Okinawans refer to it as *ikigai*, while the Nicoyans call it their *plan de vida*, but ultimately, both translate to “why I wake up in the morning.” Having a **sense of purpose** is critical as it gives you direction, increases your resilience, improves sleep quality, helps you

achieve success, and inspires a positive outlook. **Studies have found** that having a sense of purpose can reduce mortality risk and even add seven years to your life.

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Establish Community

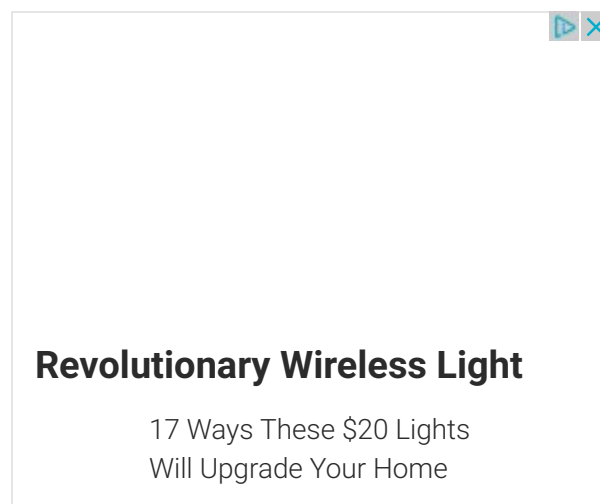
Belonging to a **faith-based community** is a common thread across the blue zones. Regardless of religion or denomination, attending a faith-based ceremony weekly has been found to increase life expectancy by roughly four years. The Loma Linda blue zone is comprised of 9,000 Seventh-day Adventists, but any religion should do the trick.

Minimize Stress

It's no secret that stress can be detrimental to your health. However, it isn't exactly avoidable, even for folks in the blue zones. Centenarians there have incorporated routines into their daily lives that help release stress. For example, Sardinians enjoy a daily happy hour, Adventists recognize a weekly Sabbath, and Ikarians take a mid-afternoon nap.

Eat Until 80 Percent Full

Have you ever enjoyed a tasty meal to the point where your stomach ached? [According to the Center for Disease Control](#), 71.6 percent of American adults are overweight while 39.8 percent are obese, likely the result of overeating. The Okinawans live by the mantra *hara hachi bu*, which encourages them to stop eating when their stomachs are nearly full. In addition to the 80 percent rule, most blue-zone residents consume heavier meals earlier in the day and their smallest meal in the late afternoon or early evening—this practice can lead to better sleep and a lower BMI.



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Eat Plant-Based

While meat can be found in many of the blue-zone diets, it is typically only consumed at celebrations or in small portions. Across the board, all of the blue-zone diets are mainly plant-based, with beans being a major staple. The Okinawan diet is rich in soy, with tofu

and miso being common dishes while the Nipponalia centers around the three sisters, squash, corn, and beans.



Kelsey Knight; Unsplash

Moderate Alcohol Intake

Residents of all the blue zones, except Adventists, consume alcohol regularly. **Studies have shown** that moderate drinkers tend to outlive non-drinkers. Folks in the blue zones typically consume one to two drinks a day, with food or in the company of friends. In Sardinia, blue-zone residents drink a glass or two of red Cannonau wine daily as it has double the amount of artery-scrubbing flavonoids than other wines.

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Sense of Belonging

You've heard it said before: You are who you surround yourself with. Studies have shown that smoking, loneliness, happiness, and obesity are contagious; the people you're surrounded by can positively or negatively impact your health. Members of the blue zones surround themselves with (or are born into) strong social circles that encourage and support a healthy lifestyle. Okinawans are so dedicated to friends and family that they create a **"moai,"** or a group of lifelong friends who provide emotional and financial support in times of need.

Prioritize Family

A trend across the blue zones is the importance of family. People in blue zones commit to a life partner, which **studies have found** to increase life expectancy. Additionally, they keep elderly parents and grandparents nearby or in the home so that they can care for them. They also invest time and love in their children so they can serve as caregivers for them when the time comes.

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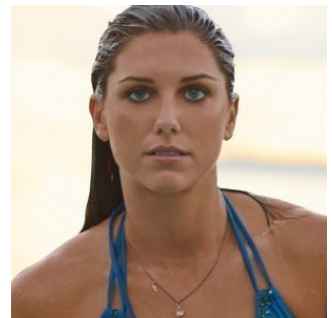
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