Clues to Living Healthier, Happier and Longer

‘Blue Zones’ give clues to how people can live longer and healthier. The secret to living longer lives is actually plural, secrets, and there are nine of them.

In 2005, explorer Dan Buettner reported in National Geographic five areas of the world where people seemed to be living longer and healthier. In each of those places, he discovered the nine common traits that seemed to explain people’s longevity, and he termed the location ‘Blue Zones.’

“Blue Zones are regions around the world where the healthiest, people live,” said K-State Research and Extension adult development and aging specialist Erin Yelland. “In addition to diet, exercise and rest, other lifestyle and social factors may contribute to their longevity.” Those Blue Zones were in Italy, Costa Rica, Greece, Japan and California.

The ‘Power Nine’ taints of Blue Zones include:

- **Move naturally.** We all know that exercise is incredibly important to our overall health and wellness. But with these Blue Zones, people aren’t going to the gym, engaging in CrossFit or running marathons. Instead they move naturally throughout the day; they may walk to the store, or garden every day. Whatever they are doing, they are moving naturally. Do you get up and move naturally?

- **Always know your purpose.** People in Blue Zones have a purpose for why they wake up in the morning. They have that “jolt” in the morning, the reason why they’re living their life and why they want to live a healthier life.

- **Downshift.** This relates to stress relief. “In America, we talk a lot about mindfulness and stress relief,” Yelland said. “But in Blue Zones, this is a natural practice for people.” For example, in Okinawa, Japan, people take a minute every day to remember their ancestors. In Loma Linda, California, people take time to pray every day. In Greece, it’s an afternoon nap. In Italy, a Happy Hour.

- **The 80% Rule.** This means that you should stop eating when you feel you are 80% full. It takes a while for our brain and stomach to communicate. Healthier people over-eat less, avoiding calories that the body does not necessarily need.

- **Plant Slant.** Yelland said people in the Blue Zones eat more plant-based foods, such as beans and nuts and green leafy vegetables. “It shows a lot about the power of food, what we’re putting into our body and how we choose to nourish ourselves,” she said.

- **Wine at 5.** Yelland encourages a regular glass of red wine. “If you have a health relationship with alcohol, one glass of red wine a day can really have positive health benefits,” she said.

What we’ve seen in the Blue Zones is that having a glass of red wine in the evening can be particularly beneficial, because most of the time they are not doing it alone. They are with other people — friends, family, on the town at a restaurant—and they are engaging in social activity.”

- **Family First.** Being around family, including non-blood family, is incredibly important because they provide a solid foundation on which you can grow. They provide stability, support and all sorts of good things that we want from positive relationships in our lives.

- **Belonging.** In all of the Blue Zones, people identify with some sort of faith-based community. Denomination doesn’t matter. What seems to be more important is that we have this sense of community and belonging and support and social network that comes along with faith-based communities.

- **Right Tribe.** Many of the people living in Blue Zones are like-minded when it comes to healthier lifestyles. When people around you are also making healthy choices, and your environment supports those choices, it’s a lot easier for you to make healthy choices, and you have the support around you to keep doing that throughout your lifetime. It can start with you and within your home.