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[Longevity]

The Healthiest People on Earth

Have you ever asked yourself why you want to eat well? Most people would answer, “Clearly it’s because I want to lose weight and feel good.” But have you ever really gotten down to it? Is it only because you want to lose weight and feel good? Have you ever thought about longevity? Do you see yourself holding your great grandchildren or being the best great great aunt ever? Do you picture yourself riding a bike at 98 or working in a garden at 102? If no, why not? Do you consider someone in their 90’s or even 80’s too old to do those things?

I’ve been fascinated with longevity since I was a little girl. I wanted to work with elderly people when I grew up and I wrote an essay in high school that described my death at 121 while skydiving.

I recently read a book called, “Blue Zones, Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who’ve Lived the Longest.” of the longest-lived peoples on earth. In the book he highlights four of the Blue Zones and believe it or not, one of them is in the US in Loma Linda, California. He found that people in was assumed that it was good genes keeping these groups alive for so long, but surprisingly, the team found that only had about 25% to do with it. The other 75% was attributed to actual habits that you and I can easily institute in our lives!

Now, since this is a book about nutrition, you’re probably wondering if nutrition had anything to do

with it. Absolutely! A few of the nine lessons that researchers found were common among all four Blue Zones, were indulging in good nutrition, having a sense of purpose, being active want to talk about three of them, though.

Good Nutrition

So far, we’ve spent much of this book talking about nutrition, but you’ll be surprised at some of things the researchers learned about nutrition in the Blue Zones.

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Firstly, **non-meat eaters don’t necessarily live longer**. There is some research to show that those who are vegan (no animal products at all) may live longer than the average American, but consider the amounts of plants the average vegan is getting in their diets versus the amount the average American gets. All the Blue Zones ate meat, and amazingly, pork was common to three of them. The difference in the meat consumption habits of these centenarians was that they ate it very rarely. Most only consumed meat in small amounts once a week and often only once a month. We know from other studies that those who eat a largely plant-based diet have less heart eating meat very sparingly has a more positive outcome than eating no meat at all. We do know that eating meat regularly, and especially as often as the average American who eats meat more than twice a week (one third of

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Americans eat meat every day), will unquestionably raise your risks for disease.

Secondly, **centenarians' main staples across the board no matter which zone they live in, are beans, vegetables and whole grains.** Their diets are largely based on plants which means they're eating less calories, but getting more nutrients from each calorie. Researchers postulate that of calories. In fact, in Okinawa, they have a saying, like a sort of prayer, that is intoned before eating. It goes like this, "Hara Hachi Bu" and means, roughly, eat until you are no longer hungry. Just that small difference means about 20% less calories each day. Researchers believe that this lower calorie intake, combined with the nutrient-dense calories of the plant-based foods that they eat, are two of the reasons Okinawans are some of the world's longest living peoples.

Thirdly, and most surprising to me, was the fact that **nuts play a huge role in longevity.** Those in who rarely consumed nuts. This is especially of note to me because in our culture we're told that nuts are very high in fat and that they shouldn't be eaten except for sparingly. I've seen diets that allow the dieter to use 1 teaspoon of peanut butter on their toast (no butter!) and advocate against any nuts beyond this small concession. One teaspoon of peanut butter will cover about a quarter of your toast. Enjoy that bite! I even had a friend who went in for a regular checkup and was told that his

cholesterol was too high so he shouldn't eat any nuts at all. Did you know that most nuts contain NO cholesterol? I got a laugh out of that one. The fact is that nuts are extremely good for like magnesium, zinc, and selenium. And the fats in nuts, as I've said over and over, are not bad for you. I like to use almond and walnut oils in baking and then I get even more of the good fats and nutrients from nuts.

To read more about the longevity cultures' health activities, see my book Purposeful Eating.

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