

Out of the

BLUE

Following long-standing eating traditions of people in the Blue Zones can lead to longer lives.

Five regions around the world hold the planet's highest concentrations of centenarians, or people who live to be 100 or older. In these regions, dubbed the Blue Zones by author and National Geographic Fellow Dan Buettner, people stay engaged socially, move frequently, and eat healthy. After extensive study of these regions, Buettner developed the Blue Zone diet.

Four rules of thumb from the Blue Zone Diet are:

1

Stop eating when you are 80 percent full.

2

Eat your smallest meal in late afternoon or evening.

3

Eat a mostly plant-based diet. Limit eating meat to no more than five times a month in three to four ounce portions.

4

Drink alcohol moderately and regularly (think one or two glasses of red wine per day).

People in the Blue Zones follow the 95/5 rule:

95 percent

of their diet is plant-based, consisting of vegetables, beans, fruits, and grains. Only five percent consists of animal products.

“People in these Blue Zones don’t eat boxed or bagged food most of the time,” says Kim Mason, MS, RD, LD, retired Nutrition Care Manager with Carson Tahoe Health. “They eat what is grown locally or what they grow themselves.”

What those foods are, however, varies by region.



IKARIA, GREECE

Longevity foods: Black-eyed peas, honey, potatoes, goat’s milk

Constant movement is the name of the game for residents of this Greek island. Whether it’s tending to their yards or walking to see a friend, they’re always on the go—unless they’re taking their afternoon nap. Their diet resembles the popular Mediterranean Diet, focusing on eating vegetables, beans, and fruit while limiting meat and dairy. Olive oil is frequently used for cooking. Ikarians also drink antioxidant-laden herbal teas, such as oregano, sage, and wild rosemary.



NICOYA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA

Longevity foods: Beans, corn, squash, papayas

Residents of Nicoya drink water that contains the highest calcium content in Costa Rica, which may contribute to their low rates of hip fractures. They also frequently visit with family and friends.

“They socialize around a meal,” Mason says. “Taking time to eat with loved ones and appreciate the food in front of you is another key Blue Zone concept.”



OKINAWA, JAPAN

Longevity foods: Green tea,

garlic, bitter melons, tofu
A key practice in Okinawa is eating something from the land and something from the sea each day. It must work, because 6.5 people in every 10,000 live to age 100, one of the highest rates in the world. Soy is used in many foods, including richly flavored miso soup and dishes like natto, which is made of fermented soy. Residents of the island have fewer cases of heart disease, cancer, and dementia than Americans.



OGLIASTRA REGION, SARDINIA

Longevity foods: Fennel, fava beans, chickpeas, milk thistle tea

“One family in this region is the longest-living family in the world,” Mason says. “One thing they pass down is a simple, delicious soup recipe that the Blue Zone diet calls longevity soup. It’s made up of things residents grow in their own garden.”

Sardinians also drink red wine made from local grapes that, Mason notes, contain more nutrients due to the soil in which they’re grown.

Bring the Blue Zone Home

What if you were told that only 20 percent of how long you live is determined by genes—the other 80 percent is lifestyle and environment?

In an effort to provide community an opportunity to increase their longevity, Carson Tahoe Health is participating in a community-wide effort to encourage gardening and the use of produce as a way of benefitting their health. In doing so, Kim Mason, MS, RD, LD, retired Nutrition Care Manager with Carson Tahoe, worked with intern Billie Hale to create a cookbook that connected gardening to the Blue Zone Diet.

“In the Blue Zones, people embrace the food they’re eating,” Mason says. “Growing their own food allows them to appreciate the food in a different way and eat it more consciously.”

One problem with gardening, Mason notes, is that many people don’t know how to use the produce they grow.

“My quest was to come up with a way to show people how to make meals from what they’re growing,” Mason says. “We outlined each of the pillars of health in the Blue Zone Diet, then paired that pillar with a recipe using foods people in our area might grow in their gardens.”

Mason sees Carson Tahoe’s Blue Zones cookbook as step one to a healthier community. She hopes it sparks future initiatives with greater community involvement.