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HOW TO LIVE TO 100



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DR JOHN CUMMINS EXPLAINS WHY SOME OF US LIVE TO A RIPE OLD AGE AND OTHERS DON'T.

YOU MIGHT EXERCISE, watch what you eat and feel healthy enough, but do you think you have 'super health'? Could you live to be 100 years old, without disease?

The conventional wisdom for achieving longevity has always been to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, spend time outdoors, exercise and not smoke. More recent medical and scientific investigation has given us a clearer picture of how to lead a healthy

life in which we are productive and full of vitality, with no chronic illness or disability.

National Geographic author, Dan Buettner, coined the term 'blue zones' for those cultures in which people are able to live well beyond the average life expectancy; blue zones include Sardinia (Italy), Loma Linda (California USA), Nicoya (Costa Rica), Ikaria (Greece) and Okinawa (Japan).

Learning from the Okinawans

The Okinawan culture has been extensively studied over a 30-year period, allowing for a close look into the secrets of their longevity. Out of 100,000 Okinawans born, 50 will reach the age of 100, compared to only 20 in the USA. In addition to living longer, they are also healthier: Okinawans will have only three years of disability before death, compared with nine years in the US. Surprisingly, genetic factors contribute to only 25 to 30 per cent of their longevity, compared to a massive 70 to 75 per cent influence of lifestyle factors (i.e., factors under their own control).

So what is it specifically that the Okinawans do? Firstly, they have a diet that is large in volume, so they feel satisfied, while consuming fewer calories than western foods. Instead of eating energy-dense foods such as large portions of protein-based meat, highly

processed carbohydrates, fried foods high in saturated fat, or processed foods such as cakes and sweets, they fill up on green leafy vegetables, soups, antioxidant-rich starches (e.g., sweet potatoes) and soy as their staple protein.

With a heavily plant-based diet that is phytonutrient and antioxidant rich, their arteries at the age of 90 are healthy and clear of plaque, whereas plaque build-up can begin in childhood in western cultures. The incidence of breast and prostate cancer is 80 per cent less among the Okinawans and the incidence of ovarian and colon cancers is half that of western cultures.

In addition to a healthy diet, they actively practice calorie restriction and stop eating when they feel 80 per cent full, a practice called 'hara hachi bu'. The Okinawans are impressively lean, and are the only population that is known to lose weight as they age.

A popular theory for why calorie restriction improves longevity is that during the normal process of digestion we inevitably cause oxidation, an unwanted by-product that damages cells and enhances cellular ageing. Therefore the less volume of food we digest, the less cellular damage that is caused.

However, a balanced diet isn't the only ingredient to a long and healthy life; exercise is also an essential component. The Okinawans have constant moderate exercise: working in their gardens or farms or recreationally through the practice of traditional dance. It goes to show that if you can't always fit in a regular exercise routine, simple practices like walking the dog or taking short breaks from work to get your body moving will contribute to keeping you fit and healthy.

The Okinawan culture has strong community bonds – family is their

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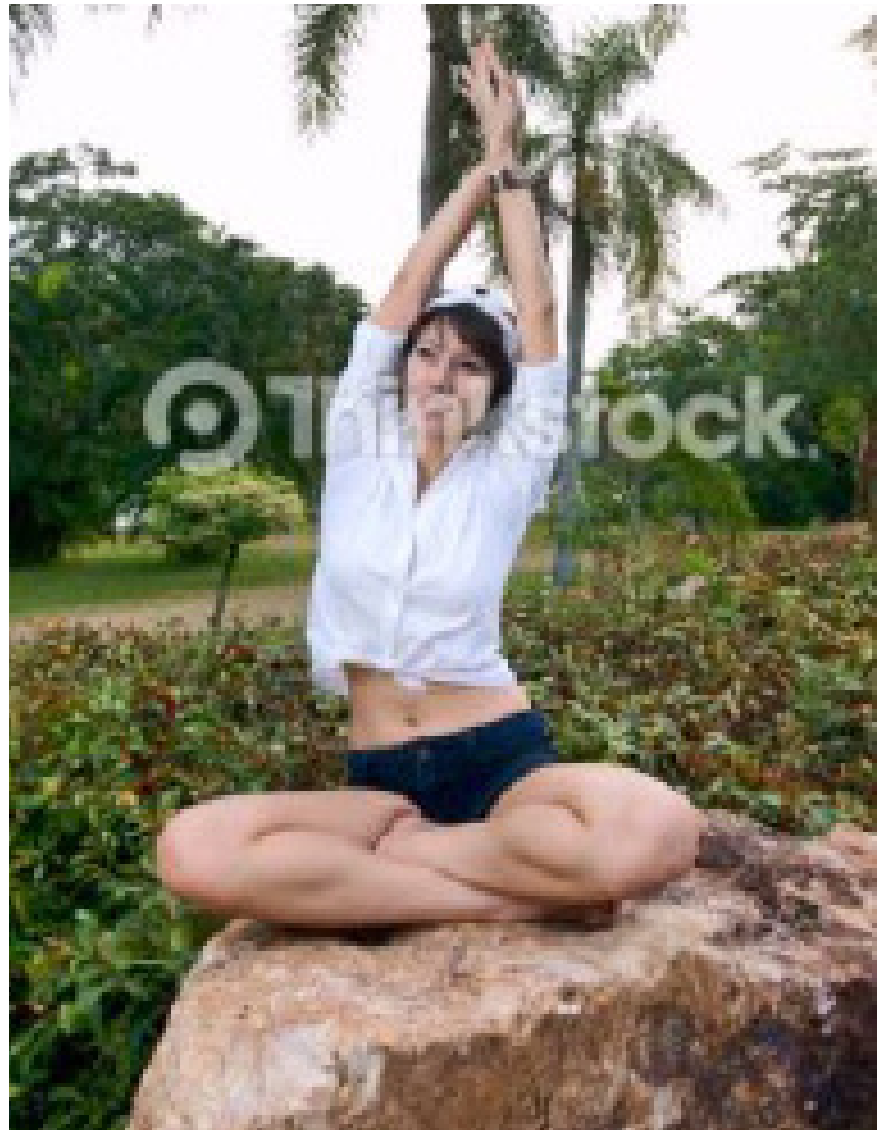
top priority and they grow old with the peers and friends they have been paired with since birth. They also have a life purpose and enjoy each day. Dan Buettner identified the same characteristics in a number of other cultures known for their longevity. The lead author of the *Okinawans Centenarian* study states 'Like four legs of a chair, the older Okinawans have combined a tasty low-calorie diet, regular physical activity, psycho-spiritual factors that help with life satisfaction and stress resistance, and social factors, such as integrative health care, into a strong foundation for lifelong health.'

What other studies show

Predictors of exceptional health were investigated in the *Honolulu Heart Study*. Exceptional health was defined as the absence of diabetes, cancer, heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, lung disease, dementia and Parkinson's diseases after the age of 75. This 40-year study tracked nearly 6,000 Japanese-American men who entered the study with an average age of 54 years. The researchers were trying to identify which factors predicted exceptional health. The odds of achieving exceptional health was massively predicted by having these factors present: being physically strong, lean, having normal blood pressure, blood sugar and triglycerides (blood fat) levels, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Other predictive factors were having a high educational level and being in a long-term relationship.

Another study, the global *Interheart* study, found that 90 per cent of heart disease was caused by lifestyle factors, and is not attributed to genetics. Therefore the risk of heart disease can be severely decreased by consuming a healthy diet, avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption and managing stress levels.

Clinical Professor of Medicine at



UCLA, Dean Ornish proved, through his studies in the 1980s, that you could show reversal in even severe coronary artery disease by making simple changes such as consuming a low fat diet, exercising for an hour each day and undertaking an hour of stress reduction, such as yoga or meditation.

Ornish has also shown that comprehensive lifestyle changes can even reverse the progression of early-stage prostate cancer. His recent studies show that lifestyle changes can impact gene expression, 'turning on' disease-preventing genes and 'turning off' genes that can promote disease, such as cancers.

What can you do?

So you've read the research, now what can you do to improve your health and your chance of living happily to 100?

The first step is to have a check-up with your doctor to see what condition you're currently in and to identify any risk factors you may have.

The second step is to take the information outlined in this article and to model what works for you. Good starting points include: adapting your diet to one that is heavily plant-based; becoming more active; embracing stress reduction practices like meditation and yoga; and surrounding yourself with social groups that nourish you. Most importantly, develop a zest for life to you enjoy every day!

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