

# Benefits of the Blue Zones Diet

Researchers have identified five places, designated the blue zones, where people live longer and have lower rates of chronic disease than in the rest of the world. Inhabitants of these places — Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California — are 10 times more likely to blow out 100 birthday candles than the average person in the United States.

Strong evidence supports following a blue zones diet, regardless of where you live, to reap a variety of potential health benefits that reduce your risk of many chronic diseases. Incorporating some or all these dietary practices and other lifestyle changes into your routine can help you live a longer, healthier, and happier life.

## ***1. The Blue Zones Diet May Help You Live Longer***

The idea of a blue zones diet came about because researchers were studying the people around the world who live the longest, healthiest lives. Those people tend to eat a lot of plant-based foods, which contain compounds known as polyphenols that have been linked to a number of health benefits. One of those benefits may be increased longevity, which researchers believe may occur as a result of slowing the onset of age-related diseases that can shorten your life span.

## ***2. May Help You Lose Weight***

While the blue zones diet isn't designed to be a weight loss plan, its emphasis on plant-based foods may lead to weight loss. Plant foods are really filling because they have more fiber. Not only do plant-based foods make you feel fuller, but they can pass through your digestive system without being fully absorbed, contributing to weight loss, according to one study. The blue zones' 80 percent rule, or eating until you are no longer hungry rather than until you are full, could also support weight loss. One study found that people who were more mindful about what they were eating had fewer cravings, didn't overeat as much, and lost weight.

## ***3. May Reduce Your Risk of Heart Problems***

A good diet is crucial for heart and cardiovascular system health, and choosing more plant-based foods and fewer animal foods helps. In addition, people in the blue zones frequently snack on nuts, and research has found that doing so may lower your risk of a heart attack. Plus, another study found that U.S. adults with diets higher in fiber had a lower risk of high blood pressure, and high blood pressure is a key risk factor for developing heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## ***4. May Reduce Your Risk of Some Types of Cancer***

The blue zones diet is similar to the Mediterranean diet, and a study of that diet found it may lower your risk of breast cancer. The focus on whole grains you get with the blue zones diet could also lower your risk of pancreatic cancer, according to a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* in February 2021. And a meta-analysis found that high-fiber diets can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer.

## ***5. May Reduce Your Risk of Type 2 Diabetes***

The health benefits of fiber is a recurring theme when it comes to the blue zones diet. "From a chronic disease standpoint, fiber helps regulate blood sugar," says Selvi Rajagopal, MD, MPH, an internal medicine and obesity specialist with Johns Hopkins Medicine. An umbrella review published in *Nutrients* found that the high fiber content of plants and whole foods could reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.



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