Wellness Around the World

It's difficult to talk about healthy aging without mentioning Blue Zones. Blue Zones are found in five pockets of the world and have populations that live decades longer than average. They have significantly high percentages of centenarians (people that live to be 100 or older) and are found in Ikaria, Greece; Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica; the Barbagia region of Sardinia, Italy; Loma Linda, California and Okinawa, Japan.

Residents of Blue Zone communities live in vastly different parts of the world but have commonalities that are believed to lead to their longevity. These commonalities have been separated into four categories: connect, move, right outlook, and eat wisely. Aging is inevitable, but let's explore each of these categories to learn how people around the world promote long-lasting wellbeing.

Connect

Staying socially engaged is arguably the most important component of healthy aging. We connect with one another as family and friends, through the communities within which we live, in our workplaces, across support networks that stretch beyond our geographic location, and in many other ways that – whether we intend them to or not – help fulfill our fundamental human need to socialize and interact. In Okinawa, Japan they organize "moais", a lifelong circle of friends that offers social, emotional, financial, and spiritual support towards each member. The need for connection is just as imperative as we age, especially as we rely on others in new ways.

Move

People in Blue Zones live naturally active lifestyles. They walk or bike where they need to go, forgo modern conveniences such as dishwashers, washing machines, farming equipment and other traditional means. To capture similar benefits as these traditionally active individuals, we, with our modern conveniences, may need to intentionally set-aside time to move each day. As you contemplate ways you can be active, focus on the concept of '**Functional Fitness**' - activities that sustain and assist your ability to perform everyday movements. Remember the use it or lose it principle - If you aren't using your muscles and joints on a regular basis, your body may eventually lose the ability to do so.

Eat Wisely

We can learn a lot from our **Blue Zone** friends by ditching food restrictions and filling our plates and pantries with foods that will satisfy and nourish. The idea is to focus on whole, fresh foods as your main source of energy and keep the flexibility needed to honor your cravings. The 80/20 rule is one Okinawans employ on a regular basis. This means to eat until you are comfortable, not miserably full, by honoring your hunger and fullness cues. An emphasis is also placed on consuming a largely plant-based diet. Focus on increasing your fruit and veggie intake, while including nuts, and beans when possible.

Right Outlook

Everyone is born for a greater purpose than simply existing. "The Okinawans call it "Ikigai" and the Nicoyans call it "plan de vida;" for both, it roughly translates to "why I wake up in the morning." This thought drives a positive outlook among elders and helps keep them active. Establishing a sense of purpose leads to feeling connected to others and reduces the risk of isolation and loneliness. It also reduces the risk of stroke, heart attack, dementia, and disabilities.