

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities: Making a Difference

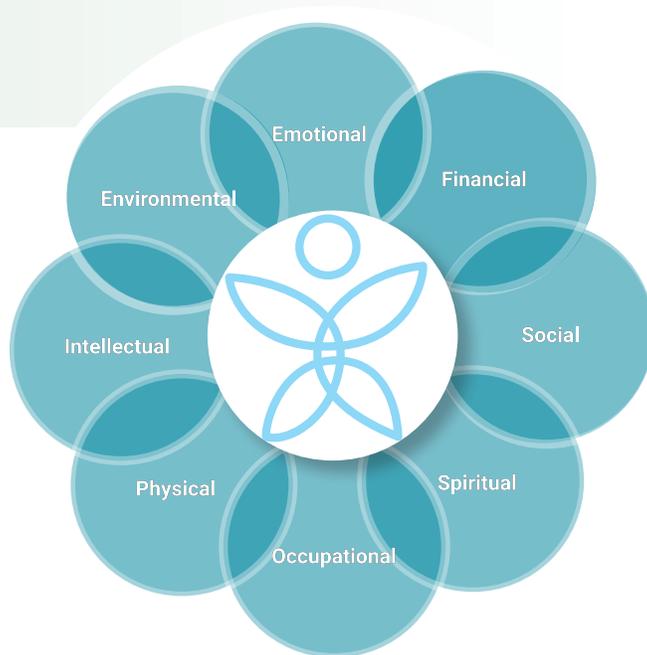
Christine Zellers, FCHS Educator of Cape May County

Wellness is a word that is used in various ways in the United States, it may sometimes describe physical or mental health. However, wellness is a combination of balance in a person's life that supports a healthy lifestyle and healthy habits in all areas of life. As early as 1947, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified wellness as "physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease". Understanding the eight dimensions of wellness and how they act to counterbalance one another can assist with attaining wellness. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) identifies the eight dimensions of wellness as physical, emotional, social, professional, intellectual, spiritual, environment and financial. Recognizing happiness in all these areas might not always be possible but striving to balance and seek mindful habits in these parts could greatly contribute to overall wellness.

Taking small steps toward each of the eight areas of wellness will make them more achievable and less overwhelming.

- ▶ To create **physical** wellness, recognize the need for physical activity, quality sleep, and a nutrient dense diet. Rather than tackling all three of these areas at once, try to get more physical activity then think about adding nutritious eating and better sleep. Concentrating on one item at a time can be less overwhelming and make it easier to achieve goals.
- ▶ **Mental and emotional health**, much like physical health, needs to be attended to when things are not quite right, but also maintained when things are going well. Realizing personal strengths and using them in a positive way will reinforce emotional health.
- ▶ **Social** interaction will assist you in maintaining wellness. Keep in contact and socialize with supportive family, friends, and coworkers. Make at least one connection each day by calling, e-mailing, or visiting someone. Join a club, social group, or volunteer to be connected to something you enjoy for social interaction.
- ▶ When practicing wellness, **professional** satisfaction and enrichment from work and hobbies will create a sense of fulfillment. Make sure to

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What Exactly Is a Blue Zone, Anyway?

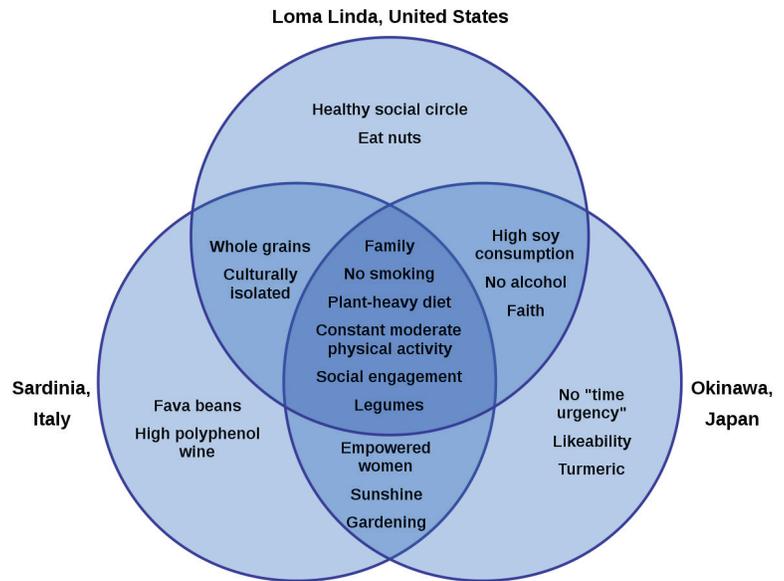
And Why Does it Have a Diet?

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Today, we are living longer than ever. In 2020, the global average human life expectancy was 75.6 years for women and 70.8 years for men. Looking back fifty years ago, this average was between 45.7- 48 years. We've increased our life expectancy by almost thirty years in the last five decades, yet even today, there are large differences in the average life spans from one country to another. What can we glean from parts of the world where the average life expectancy is significantly higher than the global average, and are there takeaways we can apply to our own lives?

If you haven't heard of Blue Zones, these are regions in the world where people are living longer than average and have high populations of centenarians (individuals who live past the age of 100). The five 'Blue Zones' are Okinawa (Japan), Sardinia (Italy), Nicoya (Costa Rica), Icaria (Greece), and Loma Linda (California, USA).



Beyond having a higher-than-average life expectancy, individuals in Blue Zones are less likely to suffer from Alzheimer's Disease and dementia. They are more likely to be active and have a higher quality of life.

An interesting fact about the five Blue Zones is that there is no geographic or ethnic similarities as the five zones are scattered across the globe. This suggests that it is lifestyle rather than genetics, climate or anything fixed to a specific area that allows its inhabitants to live long and well lives. One common thread is that inhabitants lead strong spiritual lives and are active members in their communities past the age of retirement. Loma Linda is known for its Seventh-day Adventist influence, and half of its population are members of this Protestant church. By contrast, Okinawan residents practice the indigenous belief system of the Ryukyu Islands, with an emphasis placed on demonstrating respect towards one's ancestors and centering oneself around the family home. More than the religious practices or spirituality itself, research on Blue Zones emphasizes the importance of remaining active in one's community throughout one's lifetime, maintaining relationships and fostering a sense of connectivity with other members of the community as well.

Beyond the spiritual and community elements seen in Blue Zones, nutrition patterns in these populations demonstrate that mostly plant-based, vegetarian diets reign supreme. There is an emphasis on eating legumes/beans, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and eating very little meat. Blue Zone centenarians eat about 2oz or less of meat about five times per month. Fish is

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VISIONS

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Action Steps to Maintain Wellness

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As you likely started the new year initiating your personal wellness program, here are some steps to help continue your journey on that wellness path so that you can enjoy your healthiest year yet.

The first item on the “*To-do*

List” is to do your homework. Find reliable, science-based sources of information to guide your journey through wellness. Look for guidance from your physician and sources such as the Mayo Clinic, Harvard Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Also look at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) website to find links to trustworthy sources of information.

- ▶ **Make personal and family wellness a priority.** Set your wellness goals, then create a plan to help achieve them. Perhaps use a shared calendar so everyone in the household is aware of important family dates and activities. Consider starting a new family tradition of cooking a healthy meal or taking a weekly walk together.
- ▶ **Physical activity is an essential part of a wellness plan.** How can you increase your movement each day? If you spend much of your day sitting at a desk or in a favorite chair, be sure to get up to walk every 30-45 minutes. Whenever possible, take a 10-minute walk (or longer) outdoors. Spending time outdoors can help you de-stress and relax and encourages your brain to find clarity and focus.
- ▶ **Healthy meals and snacks are also a vital component of your wellness.** Skip the unhealthy salty and sweet treats. These items are not beneficial to your body. Our diets should be 50% fruits and vegetables, with smaller amounts of protein and carbohydrates. A diet including plant-based antioxidant-rich foods can naturally reduce inflammation in our bodies. Create a regimen of eating healthy meals and drinking water as much as possible. Consume nutritious foods containing vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, plant phytochemicals, and related nutrients every day.
- ▶ **Declutter your space to help reduce stress and avoid accidental falls at home or in the office.** Sit back with a notepad and notice items that clutter your space. Take note of things that could cause hazards when in a hurry. Make a plan to add openness to the

space by rearranging where you spend time working, cooking, and socializing. Having less chaos around adds efficiency to completing tasks while reducing personal safety hazards. The space should invoke a sense of calm and relaxation.

- ▶ **Spend time with family and friends.** Studies show that socialization is important to our physical and mental health. Avoid isolation by reaching out to family and friends on a regular basis. People with a support system tend to be healthier than those without. Gather with others in-person or online to play games, share stories, or discuss books—it does wonders for the brain in addition to increasing your immune defense.
- ▶ **Sufficient quality sleep is critical to good health.** According to the CDC, studies show that insufficient sleep – less than 7-9 hours per 24-hour period – may influence several diseases and chronic conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression. The National Sleep Foundation recommends these tips for ensuring the proper quality of sleep:
 - A comfortable bed used for sleep, not watching TV.
 - Remove phones and electronic devices from your bedroom or silence them for at least 7-9 hours of sleep.
 - Engage in relaxing activities before bedtime.
 - Avoid screen time within one-hour of sleep; and
 - Avoid large meals a few hours before bedtime.

Speak to your physician if you are having difficulties sleeping.

- ▶ **“Me-time” is time well spent.** Stress can have serious implications on your physical and mental well-being. Everyone needs some personal time to care for their body and mind. For instance: explore a new hobby, read a book, listen to relaxing music, learn a new skill, or observe nature. Spend a few minutes observing photographs or artwork to look for details you haven’t noticed before. Hobbies are an effective way to immerse yourself into a project and help maintain calm in your day. Practicing mindfulness and meditation are great ways to bring clarity, focus, and moments of calm when feeling stressed. Take care your yourself first, then you will be able to successfully care for others!



Remember to keep your goals attainable with simple action steps on your wellness journey, which will be beneficial to you and your loved ones!

Reduce Your Risk of Developing Diabetes

NJ Empower to Prevent:

FCHS's Diabetes Prevention Program

Alexandra Greci, MS, RDN, LDN, CDCES, FCHS Educator

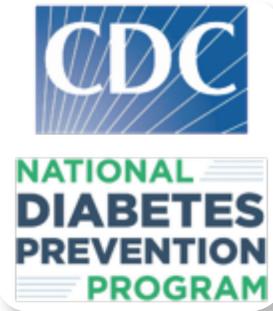
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Prediabetes is a chronic health condition where blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough to diagnose diabetes. The time of prediabetes diagnosis is an ideal time to take action and make some lifestyle changes to reduce risk of developing diabetes.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 96 million Americans 18 years and older have prediabetes¹. In 1996, a randomized clinical research trial² evaluated the effectiveness of intensive lifestyle intervention to prevent or delay the progression of type 2 diabetes in high-risk individuals. The study enrolled more than 3,200 participants over 27 clinical centers in the US, who were randomly assigned to one of three interventions. A lifestyle intervention group aimed to lose 5-7% body weight through dietary changes and increased physical activity. The other two interventions included a group that took a glucose-lowering medication, and a placebo group. Results showed that the lifestyle intervention group reduced their incidence of diabetes by 58% (71% for adults over 60yrs.), compared to 31% for the medication group. The results were applicable for people diverse

in gender, age, and ethnic/racial demographics. The approach towards preventing type 2 diabetes was changed based on the results of the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP).

The DPP research resulted in the National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP), a year-long lifestyle change program aimed at preventing diabetes. In translating the NDPP research interventions into practice, the CDC identified the need for partnerships between public and private organizations to offer the lifestyle change program in the community.

In April, 2021 the Department of Family and Community Health Science (FCHS) of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, with funding support from the NJ Department of Health, implemented the first cohort of "NJ Empower to Prevent (NJEP)," its local version of the NDPP. NJEP is a virtual, year-long, lifestyle change program led by trained CDC Lifestyle Coaches. The program is delivered in small groups completely on the Zoom platform, and consists of 16 consecutive weekly classes, followed by bimonthly and monthly sessions. Curriculum topics include increasing physical activity, healthy eating, stress management, and motivation for change. Group support and encouragement is provided through interactive discussions, challenges, special topics and check-ins with Coaches.



Outcomes for the first NJEP cohort met NDPP goals. After one year, all 15 participants had completed the program. Participant health outcomes included:

- ✓ 8 participants lost at least 5% of their starting weight³;
- ✓ 7 participants lost at least 4% of their starting weight and achieved a minimum of 150 minutes of physical activity each week³;
- ✓ 4 participants reduced their HbA1c (a measure of average blood glucose) by at least 0.2%³
- ✓ 1 participant discontinued a blood glucose lowering medication
- ✓ 4 participants reduced their BMI to within the "healthy" range.

As a result of demonstrated outcomes, in September of 2022 the NJEP program was awarded the highest level of CDC program recognition.



NJEP first cohort with their graduation certificates.

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Two additional NJEP cohorts are currently underway, and a fourth is enrolling for May, 2023. To participate, individuals must meet the following criteria established by the CDC:

- Be 18 yrs of age or older
- Have a diagnosis of prediabetes within the past year
- Have a BMI of 25 or higher (or 23 if Asian American)
- Not have been diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes
- Not currently pregnant
- Other criteria include a prior diagnosis of gestational diabetes during pregnancy or a high-risk score on the CDC Prediabetes Risk Test⁴.

The NDPP has demonstrated that through modest weight loss and healthy lifestyle behaviors, diabetes can be prevented to a large extent in high-risk individuals. FCHS's **NJ Empower to Prevent** can increase access to prediabetes prevention education and help reduce or delay the incidence of diabetes in NJ.

For more information please visit the NJEP website at <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fchs/nj-empower-to-prevent.php> or contact Alexandra Greci at greci@njaes.rutgers.edu or Shailja Mathur at mathur@njaes.rutgers.edu.

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1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Diabetes Statistics Report: Prevalence of Diagnosed Diabetes. (2022, September 30). <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/data/statistics-report/diagnosed-diabetes.html>.
2. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. About NIDDK. Research areas. Diabetes. Diabetes prevention program. (2022, May 22). <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/about-niddk/research-areas/diabetes/diabetes-prevention-program-dpp>
3. Indicates a CDC DPP program recognition outcome
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Could you have diabetes? Take the test. (2022). <https://www.cdc.gov/prediabetes/takethetest/>

What Exactly is Wellness?

- continued from page 1

take breaks like meal breaks or even a walk break to clear your head and help you to focus at work. If work isn't giving you all that you want, or if you don't work, try a hobby that is rewarding.

- ▶ People generally know their **intellectual** abilities, expand on that, and learn new things to feel engaged. Reading or taking part in an activity that expands your mind can develop your intellect.
- ▶ Take time for **spiritual** practices and connections too. This may include religion, meditation, yoga, or another activity that creates a sense of spiritual connection. Practice being kind to others for spirituality and remember to be kind to yourself too!
- ▶ **Environmental** wellness can mean the environment itself- but that is something that is very overreaching and hard to control. Conversely, our direct environment is something we can control, therefore think of personal surroundings. Organize work and home spaces for a balanced personal environment by reducing clutter. Make time to enjoy the outdoor environment regularly and notice the sound of birds or a cool breeze to assist with being in the present and calming the mind.
- ▶ **Financial** wellness means finding a sense of satisfaction from not only your current finances but future finances. Make sure to find ways to spend your money and budget creatively by setting financial goals.

The eight dimensions of wellness are a framework for achieving personal satisfaction and overall wellness. If you feel unbalanced in one area, take time to focus on improving that area. For instance, if socially you feel isolated then take some time to expand social relationships for support. Being physically active has been shown to improve mental health and that can create a balance, not only in the physical area but in the emotional area too. Keep all eight of these dimensions in mind to achieve personal wellness.



Don't Set Resolutions-

Create Sustainable Financial Atomic Habits

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This first *Small Steps to Health and Wealth™* (SSHW) message of 2023 continues a discussion of New Year's resolutions vs. habits from the [January 2020 message](#) in the SSHW Finance [Message Archive](#). The key take-away of that article is that change is hard when people rely on willpower, memory, and other human factors.

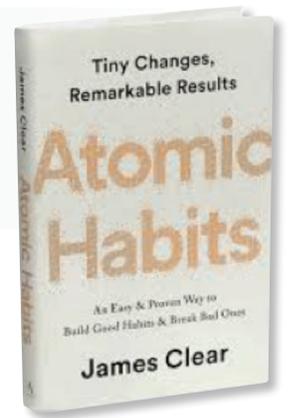
Instead, it is much easier to take positive action on financial goals when you establish positive habits that become part of your daily routine.

Habits put *solutions* into resolutions. They are repetitive behaviors associated with positive outcomes. Many people have a hard time building new habits, however, especially if they are comfortable with their old ones. James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*, [recommends four ways](#) to create a good habit:

- ✓ **Make it obvious** (e.g., use "habit stacking" to add a new positive financial habit to an existing one)
- ✓ **Make it attractive** (e.g., join a group where your desired behavior is considered the norm)
- ✓ **Make it easy** (e.g., reduce friction by decreasing the number of steps involved)
- ✓ **Make it satisfying** (e.g., use reinforcement by giving yourself rewards)

Clear defines atomic habits as small, repetitive actions that require little effort or motivation but can lead to big, transformative results. Many people underestimate the power of small daily improvements, such as doing 1% better every day. You can think of atomic habits as "the compound interest of self-improvement."

SSHW [behavior change strategy #15, Automate Good Habits and Create Templates](#), acknowledges the importance of habits and automated behaviors in changing behavior. Automation is the perfect antidote for procrastination because it reduces the number of decisions people need to make. As David Bach, author of *The Automatic Millionaire*, notes "Do it once- the rest is automatic!"



Some examples of positive financial habits that occur via automatic processes include:

- **Payroll deductions for a tax-deferred** retirement savings plan
- **Payroll deductions, via a credit union**, to build or maintain an emergency fund
- **Automatic checking account** to savings account transfers
- **Automatic debits** from a checking account to buy mutual fund or stock shares
- **Automatic bill-paying** for recurring expenses such as utility bills and loan payments
- **Any pay yourself first (PYF)** strategy where savings is deposited from gross income before it is spent (think of PYF as "a bill you owe yourself").
- **Automatic portfolio rebalancing** done by some custodians of retirement savings accounts

Goals (resolutions) and habits differ in several key ways, so it is important to have both:

- ✓ **Goals provide direction** and can be revised as needed. They must be achieved to consider them a "win."
- ✓ **Habits are systems-based** and focus on the process of making a change vs. achieving final results.

Habits have four stages:

1. **Cue** (i.e., information about a future reward)
 2. **Craving** (wanting the feeling that a reward provides),
 3. **Response** (the actual habit performed to get a reward), and
 4. **Reward** (the satisfaction that results from changed behavior).
- Example: information about retirement savings plans is a cue, feeling financially secure is a craving, signing up for automatic savings is a response, and future wealth is the reward.



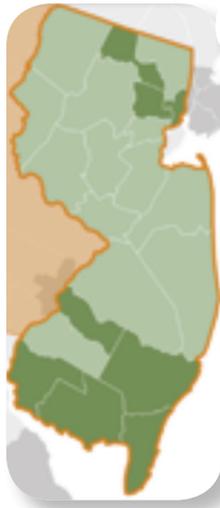
In summary, small positive steps, done consistently can lead to big outcomes. Also, early success is very motivational. When people see how far they've already come, they often want to keep on going and do more.

You Can Help Neighbors in Need

by Donating to Food Pantries in Your Area



Joan Healy, MBA, RDN, FCHS-SNAP-Ed Senior Program Coordinator Supervisor



Food Insecurity Rates

No Data

0-10.8%

10.9-21.7%

21.8-32.6%

32.7-43.5%

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the issue of food insecurity for neighbors in all of our New Jersey communities. In addition, in February 2023, the increased benefits provided to recipients during the pandemic, under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP—formerly food stamps), expired. This benefit reduction, combined with ongoing inflation, is expected to result in even higher food insecurity levels. The USDA defines food insecurity as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

According to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), in 2020, New Jersey’s food insecurity rate was 8.3%, but that rate varies by county, as the map below shows. FRAC, in its May 2022 report, [“Hunger and Its Solutions in New Jersey”](#) (www.frac.org) notes that food insecurity affects people well beyond just experiencing hunger: “Food insecurity has serious health repercussions across the lifespan, negatively impacting the ability of children to develop and learn, as well as fueling harmful and chronic health conditions, costing New Jersey an estimated \$1.3 billion each year.”

Feeding America, the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States, has a national network of food banks and food programs that help people find food in their communities. “A food bank is a non-profit that safely stores millions of pounds of food that will soon be delivered to local food programs...a food pantry is a distribution center where hungry families can receive food.” There are five food banks in New Jersey: Community Food Bank of New Jersey, The Food Bank for South Jersey, Fulfill Food Bank, Norwescap, and Mercer Street Friends, and each work with a network of food pantries in their geographic areas to distribute food.

Food pantries in your area are always in need of food donations. Some food pantries provide lists of the food products they are most in need of at a particular time, but in general, listed below are Feeding America’s suggestions for healthy food donations:

Fruits and Vegetables

- Fresh produce*
- Low-sodium or water packed canned vegetables
- Canned fruits in 100% juice or lite syrup
- 100% fruit and vegetable juices
- Dried fruits and vegetables (with no added sugar or fat).

Proteins

- Low-sodium or water packed canned meats and seafood such as chicken, tuna, salmon
- Dried beans, peas and lentils
- Low-sodium canned beans and peas
- Fresh or frozen meat*

Dairy and Dairy Substitutes

- Milk*
- Shelf stable milk or non-dairy alternatives

100% Whole Grains

- Whole-wheat pasta, barley, brown rice, and wild rice
- Whole-grain cereal and rolled oats with at least 3g of fiber/ serving (Low-sugar or unsweetened cereals and oats are also highly encouraged.)

Healthy Fats

- Low-sodium nuts and nut butters

*Check to see if the food drive has the capacity to accept this as a donation.

If you can make a donation, please reach out to a local food pantry, and ask what items they are most in need of to help your neighbors in need.

Food Bank	Counties Served
Community Food Bank of New Jersey	Atlantic, Bergen, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, and Union
The Food Bank of South Hersey	Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem
Fulfill Food Bank	Ocean and Monmouth
Norwescap	Hunterdon, Sussex, and Warren
Mercer Street Friends	Mercer

What Exactly Is a Blue Zone, Anyway?

And Why Does it Have a Diet? - *continued from page 2*



consumed, but not as frequently as one might think, for an average of 3oz approximately 3 times per week. Unlike the standard American diet high in added sugar, Blue Zone residents eat about a fifth of the amount of added sugar that the average North American consumes. Finally, foods are generally consumed in their most natural form. Single-ingredient, raw, cooked, ground, or fermented whole foods are all emphasized over processed foods in Blue Zone meals.

Residents in each country eat very different diets so a more appropriate way to refer to this 'diet' would be to call it a 'Blue Zone Lifestyle,' because its key tenets are rooted in community activity along with spiritual and interpersonal connectedness. Living longer than average is a happy by-product of the Blue Zone Lifestyle.

