

Wellness Wednesday



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Living Longer and Healthier: Insights from the Blue Zones

Did you ever wonder why some people in certain parts of the world live longer and healthier lives? What lifestyle choices do they make that contribute to their longevity? These questions have been explored in a new Netflix docuseries that takes us on a journey to the "Blue Zones" - regions where people have the longest lifespans and healthspans. In this Wellness Wednesday, we will explore the secrets of these Blue Zones and discover how their lifestyle habits align with medical research. By adopting some of these habits, we can improve our own health and well-being.

The Blue Zones: Exploring the Regions of Longevity

The term "Blue Zones" was coined by journalist, explorer, and National Geographic fellow, Dan Buettner. These zones are not confined to a specific part of the world; instead, they span across five distinct regions: Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica; Icaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California. What sets these regions apart is the high number of centenarians, or people living to 100 years and beyond.



Buettner's research reveals certain common themes observed in these Blue Zones that can inform strategies for improving our own health and lifespan. These themes include diet, mindful eating, social engagement, movement, stress reduction, and having a life purpose. Let's explore each of these habits in more detail and see how they contribute to longevity.

Nourishing the Body with a Plant-Based Diet

One of the key factors contributing to the longevity of people in the Blue Zones is their diet. These regions emphasize a plant-based approach, with a focus on consuming plenty of fruits, vegetables, and legumes such as lentils, peas, beans, and peanuts. Dr. Nate Wood, an internal medicine doctor at Yale Medicine, emphasizes the importance of incorporating these foods into our diet for their health benefits.

Research has consistently shown that a plant-based diet has numerous advantages for our well-being. Dr. Sadeer Al-Kindi, a preventive cardiologist at Houston Methodist Hospital, highlights the impact of a plant-based diet on reducing cholesterol, blood pressure, and the risk of heart disease. To improve our healthspan and lifespan, it is also crucial to limit our intake of salt and processed meats.

Mindful Eating: Listening to Our Hunger and Fullness Cues

In the Okinawan Blue Zone, people practice a form of mindful eating known as "hara hachi bu." This concept involves stopping eating when one is 80% full. Dr. Wood explains that this practice helps individuals stay in touch with their hunger and fullness cues, preventing overeating and promoting better digestion.

Mindful eating is not only limited to the Okinawan Blue Zone but is also a common habit observed in all the Blue Zones. The act of paying attention to our bodies and being mindful of our eating habits can have a significant impact on our overall health and well-being.

The Power of Social Engagement

A strong sense of community and social engagement is a common theme in all the Blue Zones. Whether through religious communities, close family units, or deep friendships, a strong social network plays a crucial role in promoting longevity and happiness. Dr. Wood emphasizes the positive influence of social relationships on our health, while also highlighting the negative effects of loneliness and a lack of social connections.

Research conducted in the United States supports the idea that social isolation can have detrimental effects on the aging process. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate and nurture our social connections, as they contribute to our overall well-being and longevity.

Movement: Embracing an Active Lifestyle

Another common habit observed in the Blue Zones is the emphasis on physical activity and movement. People in these regions tend to lead active lifestyles, incorporating movement into their daily routines. Whether it's opting for a walk instead of driving or taking the stairs instead of the elevator, small changes can add up to create a life that involves more movement.

Dr. Wood emphasizes the importance of daily movement in promoting healthy aging. By limiting the amount of time we spend sedentary and incorporating more physical activity into our lives, we can support our bodies' natural mechanisms and age better.

Stress Reduction: Taking Care of Our Mental Well-being

Chronic stress is a significant contributor to various health issues and can have serious implications for our physical and mental well-being. Dr. Wood warns that untreated stress can lead to hormonal changes, inflammation, chronic diseases, and even premature death.

In the fast-paced and demanding world we live in, it is essential to prioritize stress reduction and self-care. Finding healthy coping mechanisms, such as exercise, meditation, or engaging in hobbies, can help manage and alleviate stress. By taking care of our mental well-being, we can positively impact our overall health and increase our chances of living a longer and healthier life.

Finding Purpose: The Impact of a Meaningful Life

Having a sense of purpose is another key aspect observed in the Blue Zones. People in these regions often have a life purpose that drives them, whether it's helping others, animals, or living an ethical life. Having a sense of purpose has been linked to emotional and mental well-being, as well as reduced stress levels.

Dr. Wood highlights the importance of finding a life purpose and the positive impact it can have on our overall health. By aligning our actions with our values and finding meaning in what we do, we can lead more fulfilling lives and contribute to our longevity.

Adopting Blue Zone Habits: 5 Small Steps for Big Changes

The great news is that incorporating Blue Zone habits into our own lives is within reach. We don't have to make drastic changes overnight; instead, we can start small and gradually incorporate these habits into our daily routines.

One of the most significant changes we can make is to focus on our diet. Increasing our intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds while reducing processed foods and meats can have a profound impact on our health. Starting with one meatless meal a week or replacing processed snacks with healthier alternatives can be a great way to begin.

Building and nurturing social connections is another crucial aspect. Joining groups, spending time with family, or reaching out to friends can help improve our social engagement and overall well-being.

Additionally, incorporating daily movement into our lives can bring about positive changes. Taking the stairs, going for a walk, or engaging in physical activities we enjoy can contribute to a more active lifestyle.

Reducing stress and finding healthy ways to cope with it is equally important. Engaging in activities that help us relax and unwind, such as meditation, yoga, or hobbies, can significantly impact our mental well-being.

Lastly, finding meaning and purpose in our lives can lead to a more fulfilling and fulfilling life. Reflecting on our values, passions, and how we can contribute to the world can help us discover our life purpose.

Embracing a Long and Healthy Life

While the Blue Zones showcase regions with the highest number of centenarians, it's important to note that these habits are not limited to these areas. The evidence-based strategies observed in the Blue Zones align with other research on healthy aging and longevity.

Leading a long and healthy life requires addressing the major causes of death, such as heart disease and cancer. By adopting habits such as a plant-based diet, regular physical activity, stress reduction, and finding purpose in our lives, we can lower the risk of chronic diseases and increase our lifespan.

It's important to remember that implementing these habits is not always easy, but they don't necessarily require significant financial investments. By starting small and making gradual changes, we can create a lifestyle that supports our well-being and promotes longevity.

Let's embrace the lessons from the Blue Zones and embark on a journey towards a longer, healthier, and more fulfilling life.



MUMMY JALAPENO POPPERS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 jalapeno peppers, sliced in half lengthwise, seeded and stemmed
- 3 ounces light cream cheese
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 medium scallions, green part only, sliced
- 2 ounces part-skim sharp cheddar, about 1/2 cup
- 1 egg white, beaten (whole egg works fine too)
- Candy eyes (available at craft stores or supermarkets)

For the dough:

- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour, whole wheat, or gluten-free mix, plus more for dusting (5 ounces)
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup non-fat plain Greek yogurt (Stonyfield or Fage 0%)

Mummy Jalapeno Poppers are a fun, festive twist on the classic jalapeno poppers. They are filled with a creamy and cheesy mixture of cream cheese, cheddar, and scallions, wrapped in strips of Greek yogurt dough, and baked until hot and bubbly. The result is a deliciously spicy appetizer that is perfect for Halloween parties or any gathering where you want to add a little heat and amusement to the menu.

VARIATIONS

There are endless possibilities for customizing your Mummy Jalapeno Poppers. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Cheese Variation: Swap the cheddar cheese with mozzarella for a milder flavor or experiment with other types of cheese that you enjoy.

Bacon Lover's Poppers: Add chopped, cooked bacon to the cheese filling for an extra savory twist.

Double or Triple the Recipe: If you're hosting a larger gathering, feel free to double or triple the recipe to accommodate more guests.

Nutrition Information

Calories: 65 Protein: 4g Carbohydrates: 8g
Fat: 2g Saturated Fat: 1g Cholesterol: 7mg
Sodium: 162.5mg Fiber: 0.5g Sugar: 1g



INSTRUCTIONS



Preparing the Jalapenos:

- Preheat your oven to 350°F and line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat or parchment paper. If using parchment paper, spray it with oil to avoid sticking.
- In a medium bowl, combine the cream cheese, cheddar, Parmesan, and scallions. Fill each jalapeno half with the cheese filling using a small spoon or spatula.

Making the Dough:

- In another medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Add the Greek yogurt and mix with a fork or spatula until well combined. The dough will resemble small crumbs.
- Lightly dust flour on a work surface and remove the dough from the bowl. Knead the dough a few times until it is smooth and tacky, but not sticky. This should take about 15 turns.

Wrapping the Jalapenos:

- Dust your work surface and a rolling pin with more flour. Roll the dough out thin to a rectangle that measures about 13 x 9 inches.
- Slice the dough into 1/2-inch thick slices. Wrap each slice of dough around a jalapeno half, leaving room for the eyes. Place the wrapped jalapenos on the prepared baking sheet.
- Repeat the process with the remaining jalapenos and dough.

Baking the Poppers:

- Brush each wrapped jalapeno with the beaten egg white. This will give the dough a golden and shiny appearance after baking.
- Bake the Mummy Jalapeno Poppers in the preheated oven for approximately 30 minutes, or until the jalapenos are hot and the dough is golden.

Adding the Eyes:

- Once the poppers are out of the oven, add the candy eyes to each one, creating the "mummy" effect. Serve the poppers warm and enjoy!

FEATURED EXERCISE

<https://www.self.com/gallery/morning-stretches>

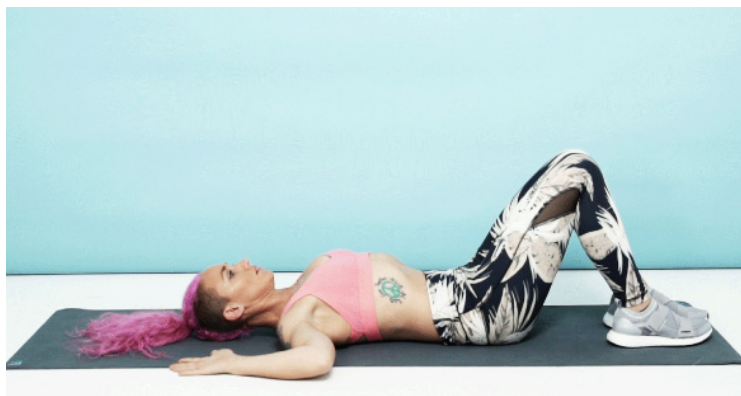
Featured Exercise ▶ Floor Angel

- Lie faceup with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, arms on the floor with elbows bent at 90 degrees and palms facing up toward the ceiling.
- Keeping your arms in contact with floor, slide your hands overhead, straightening your elbows, until your index fingers touch each other.
- Slide your arms back down to the starting position, keeping your arms and hands in contact with the floor throughout the movement.
- Repeat this movement for 30 seconds, focusing on keeping the upper arms, forearms, and hands in contact with the floor, or as close as possible, throughout the movement. Avoid arching your lower back as you stretch your arms overhead.

If you're unable to fully straighten your arms, keep your elbows slightly bent as you reach your arms overhead. You can also do this stretch standing with your back against the wall.

The Benefits:

The floor angel is a highly effective stretch that targets shoulder mobility and activates the shoulder stabilizer muscles. It also engages a range of postural muscles in the upper back. This versatile exercise requires no equipment and can contribute to improved mobility, range of motion, and form on overhead work and all types of presses.



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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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