

*Good stuff, though best part, I believe, is “eat more leaves less seeds”
and beans are seeds*

John Bell

**Dan Buettner’s Blue Zone Solution:
eat more beans for a long healthy life**

by

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The Times

GENES dictate only 20 per cent of longevity. Lifestyle and environment account for the rest. That’s the conclusion of Dan Buettner, adventurer and documentary-maker from Minnesota, who spent a decade studying the lifestyle and diet traits of long-lived communities in so-called “blue zones”: Ikaria in Greece, Okinawa in Japan, the Barbagia region of Sardinia, Loma Linda in California and Nicoya in Costa Rica.

The people in these places significantly outlive the rest of us, enjoying lower rates of heart disease, diabetes and dementia.

To try to live longer, Buettner does not tell us to become teetotal, go on a strict diet, eschew caffeine or start training for marathons. That’s where the Western world has been going wrong. Self-discipline, he says, is a muscle that tires, and such regimens have failure rates of more than 90 per cent.

No, the key to the longevity of those who live to 100 in these areas seems to be to live in cultures that make the right choices without you noticing. “None of these people try to live to be 100,” says Buettner, author of *The Blue Zones Solution: Eating and Living Like the World’s Healthiest People*. “They are products of their environment.” The people he met did lots of walking, grew their own vegetables and often went to bed late and slept in. However, if he had to sum up the key to a long life in a single word, it would be beans.

Buettner believes they are the “greatest longevity foods” and that eating beans of every variety, including fava, black, soy and lentil, is fundamental to healthy living and the “cornerstone of every longevity diet”. Blue-zone people are “eating a cup of beans a day on average”.

The other striking feature of these people’s diets: they eat very little meat. In most of the blue zones, meat is consumed on average about once a week and in a serving about the size of a deck of cards; 95 per cent of their diet comes from a plant or plant product. It isn’t that they don’t like meat or object to it but simply that it is treated more like a condiment or celebratory item than a regular staple food.

Buettner, the son of a dairy farmer who grew up as a “midwestern meat loaf and pork chop eater”, doesn’t claim to be a paragon of good health (“last night I was drinking tequilas”) but believes one day “our meat-eating habits are going to be looked at in the same way as we look at our smoking habits in the 1970s. There will be diehards that do it but no one will be ignoring the fact that it is lowering our life expectancy.”

Why are beans so special? They are high in fibre, vitamins and micronutrients and they remove the need for animal protein so are better for the gut. “When you eat a lot of meat, the gut bacteria, the flora, of your gut changes to digest it,” says Buettner. “So a certain type of bacteria thrives when you eat a lot of meat; that bacteria causes inflammation, which is at the root of every age-related disease.”

When you eat beans, however, you switch to another type of flora (flatulence occurs, but he says it lasts only a couple of weeks), which lowers inflammation and is “highly correlative

with lower obesity”. Walter Willett, of the Harvard School of Public Health, is quoted in Buettner’s book as saying, “Meat is like radiation: we don’t know the safe level.”

Buettner, whose first book on the subject, *The Blue Zones*, became a bestseller, has identified nine traits he calls “the power 9”.

They include, cheerily, drinking wine (people in all blue zones “drink wine moderately and regularly”); natural movement, such as walking to work or doing housework; eating mostly plant-based food (what he calls the plant slant) and stopping eating when your stomach is 80 per cent full (blue zones eat their smallest meal by early evening). Blue zones also drink strong coffee. A minority of them (mainly men) even smoke or have smoked. “The bad news is: smoking kills. The good news is that if you quit you can still live a long life.” A report from Public Health England found poor diet was a more important factor than smoking for causing fatal illness, but Buettner doesn’t rule out any of the things other health programs may advise you to avoid.

When it comes to beverages, the blue zone way is to have coffee at breakfast, tea in the afternoon, wine at 5pm and water all day, and never to have fizzy drinks, including diet ones. Buettner sympathises with those eating poor diets and suffering ill health and obesity. In the 1970s, a third as many people were overweight. The World Health Organisation predicts soaring rates of obesity and overweight by 2030 in Western countries.

“If you are overweight ... it’s probably not your fault,” Buettner says. “Our environment has changed. You can’t walk through an airport or get cough medicine without running into a gauntlet of sweets, chocolate and crisps.”

www.theaustralian.com.au/life/food-wine/dan-buettners-blue-zone-solution-eat-more-beans/story-e6frg8jo-1227574630557

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