

The Healing Power of Plants

I have been fascinated with the Blue Zones® since I first learned about them. The five “Blue Zones” — locations around the world with the happiest, longest-living populations — were discovered through exploration and research.¹ The communities in these zones share 9 common characteristics, including healthy diets. With March being National Nutrition Month, we will just look at the power of nutrition in the blue zones locations and thus in overall wellbeing.

One of the key common characteristics that the blue zones locations share is that they have a “plant slant” diet. This means that the majority of their diet consists of plant-based foods. For instance in the Barbagia region of Sardinia, one of the blue zones locations, they primarily eat beans, whole wheat and garden vegetables. In Ikaria, Greece they eat more of a Mediterranean diet that is high in vegetables and olive oil and low in dairy and meat. What can be learned is that these locations eat more fresh, in season vegetables and little amounts of meat. So, it appears the focus is on fresh vegetables, whole grains and beans.

This coincides with the My Plate, which recommends that half your plate be vegetables and fruit.²

Making this one simple change could make a huge impact on your overall health. Of course we have all heard that we should eat our vegetables and fruits. Fruit seems to be a little easier for most of us to get enough of, but many Americans struggle with getting the recommended amount of vegetables.

So, why should we eat our vegetables? Vegetables are high in fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other properties that really are powerhouses for our health. It has been discovered that people who “eat more vegetables and fruits as part of an overall healthy diet are likely to have reduced risk of some chronic diseases”.³ What exactly does that mean? It means that many chronic diseases could possibly be prevented through an overall healthy lifestyle, which includes eating plenty of vegetables and fruits.

In fact, many studies have shown that vegetables and fruits have anti-inflammatory properties.⁴ Many chronic diseases occur hand-in-hand with inflammation, so by fueling our body with vegetables and fruits we could be reducing inflammation and thus possibly helping reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases.

How do you know how many fruits and vegetables you should be eating? You can go to <https://www.myplate.gov/> to see. You can also just focus on making half your plate fruit and vegetables.

Especially now, many people are looking for ways to boost their health and boost their immunity and this can include many different areas of your life, but one simple way to get started right now is to do what our parents have been telling us all along — “Eat your vegetables”.

Tera Moorehead is the Director of Community Outreach at Ridgecrest Regional Hospital. With dual master's degrees in nutrition and education, Tera shares her passion for health and wellness through various programs offered free to the community through RRH. You can contact her at 760-499-3825.

1. [Live Longer, Better - Blue Zones](#)
2. [Start Simple With MyPlate Today \(azureedge.net\)](#)
3. [Vegetables | MyPlate](#)
4. [Anti-Inflammatory Diet in Clinical Practice: A Review - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)