

## Blue Zones Tips for Longer, Better Living

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA IS KNOWN AS A PARADISE of sugar-sand beaches and sunny skies. But long-term health and above-average longevity may soon come to define our area as well.

More than a decade ago, researchers began drawing blue concentric circles around the villages with the largest number of centenarians, dubbed “Blue Zones,” and noticed certain trends emerging over and over in these places. The five main Blue Zones referenced in the original research are Sardinia, Italy; Okinawa, Japan; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California.

We may soon add Naples, Florida, to that list. Dr. Allen Weiss, president and CEO of NCH Healthcare System, has made turning Southwest Florida into the next Blue Zone one of his top initiatives. By partnering with local agencies and not-for-profit groups, NCH is leading the charge toward a healthier future.

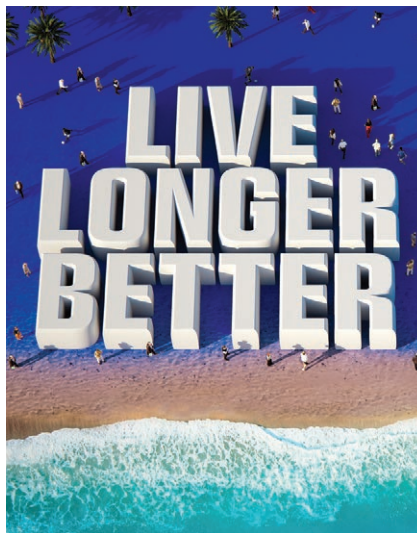
“Ultimately, our goal is that Southwest Florida is the healthiest community in the country,” Dr. Weiss says. “The change will be incremental. I think over the next decade is a good goal.”

Dr. Weiss recently recruited the former Director of Nutrition & Health Education for Collier County Department of Public Health, Deb Millsap, who brings a strong background in nutrition and public health. “She’s mission-critical as chair of this project,” Dr. Weiss says. “We’re literally having trouble keeping up because the response to this initiative has been so overwhelmingly positive.”

Local agencies and citizens will need to engage in the concept to achieve a

major impact. Luckily, the nine core principles researchers found across Blue Zones happen to be (at least for the most part) pretty enjoyable.

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Live longer, better by applying the Blue Zones Power 9<sup>®</sup> to your life:

**Move Naturally:** Take that extra trip up or down the stairs instead of loading things at the top or bottom to take up later. Walk a dog, do your own yard and housework, and get rid of some of the timesaving electronics and power equipment that have “simplified” your life.

**Purpose:** Create an internal inventory of your life. Try to articulate your values,

passions, gifts and talents. What are the things you like to do and the things you don’t? Then put your skills into action in ways that add meaning to your life and the lives of others. People with purpose live up to seven years longer.

**Down Shift:** Find a stress-relieving strategy that works for you and make it a routine. You’ll be able to benefit both physically and emotionally.

**80% Rule:** Stop eating when your stomach is 80 percent full. The 20 percent gap between not being hungry and feeling full could be the difference between losing or gaining weight.

**Plant Slant:** Put less meat and more plants on your plate. The cornerstone of most centenarian diets is beans, with favorites including fava, black, soy and lentils. Limit lean meat portions to the size of a deck of cards, no more than twice a week. And start eating nuts—a handful a day can give you an extra two to three years of life expectancy.

**Wine @ Five:** If you have a healthy relationship with alcohol, enjoy a glass of wine with good friends each day. Be sure to drink responsibly—limit your daily intake to one glass for women and two glasses for men.

**Belong:** Belong to a faith-based community. Research shows that attending faith-based services four times per month can add four to 14 years to your life. If it’s been awhile, ask friends and neighbors for suggestions or search for additional information online.

**Loved Ones First:** Invest time with your family. Keeping your aging parents and grandparents in or near your home, caring for children and being in a positive, committed relationship can add up to six years of life expectancy.

**Right Tribe:** Assess your social circles and surround yourself with people who support positive behaviors. This will do more to add years to your life than just about anything else. **NH**