

# BLUE ZONES

“Your body hears everything your mind says” – Naomi Judd



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## Supercharge longevity with gratitude

Sebastien Saitta Special to Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Power 9, a set of principles that promote long-term health and well-being, is the reason many people live to be at least 100 in the five Blue Zones around the world. But what if these principles could be supercharged? Kind of like watching your favorite thriller in 3D, or for spicy food lovers, it’s adding that perfect hot sauce to your already favorite meal. • The concept of gratitude which has long been recognized as a core component of living a happy and enjoyable life and is an ingredient to give the Power 9 principles that extra boost. Here are ways to incorporate gratitude into each one.

### Move Naturally

Each day, when you wake up, instead of thinking of any problems you need to tackle for the day, focus first on appreciating your body and being grateful for the fact that you are healthy enough to move and get out of bed. It was Confucius who said, “I was complaining that I had no shoes till I met a man who had no feet.” Whether you are going for a walk, planting in the garden, or riding your bike, practice feeling grateful for the ability to carry out these tasks.

### Belong

We live in a country that allows us the freedom to openly follow and practice any religion we choose and without the fear of persecution. The next time you are at your place of worship, take time to reflect on this freedom as nearly 70 percent of the world’s 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion according to a new study by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life.

### Eighty percent rule

When it comes to helping you from overeating, a little gratitude goes a long way. Susan Peirce Thompson, a cognitive scientist who specializes in the psychology of eating says that cultivating feelings of gratitude can boost your impulse control, helping you slow down and make better decisions. When you want to go for that second helping of stuffing this Thanksgiving, simply walk away from the table and focus on three things you are grateful for to help you reset.

### Loved ones first

One of the best ways to put family first is to simply let them know that they are appreciated. When you are spending time with family this Thanksgiving, tell them that you are grateful that they are a part of your life. William Arthur Ward said, “Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.”

### Downshift

Meditation is one of the most effective and powerful ways to downshift and comes in many different forms. Take time to do a gratitude meditation which is a type of meditation that focuses on expressing gratitude for all the things in your life. Famous author, Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.” Some gratitude meditation practices include keeping a gratitude journal, sitting quietly and reflecting on all that you are thankful for, or simply feeling appreciation for your morning coffee.

### Friends at 5

It’s no secret that there are many benefits of friendship that include support, comfort, camaraderie, and a sense of purpose. When spending time together, show your friends that you appreciate them by offering to buy a cup of coffee, giving a sincere compliment, or simply set aside your mobile device and truly pay attention to them and communicate. Or, pick up the phone and call a friend that you haven’t seen or talked to in a while to tell them that you were thinking of them.

### Plant slant

Eating a plant-based diet has been shown to reduce the incidence of chronic disease and a dose of gratitude may be just what you need to help you eat more of these healthy foods. New research by Fritz and colleagues in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology suggest that spending only a few minutes engaging in a gratitude activity (specifically, writing a “gratitude letter”) can motivate healthy food choices. Next time you are faced with the choice of pumpkin pie or fruit salad for dessert, step away, pick up a pen and paper, and get to writing that gratitude letter!

### Right tribe

The people you spend time with has a powerful effect on your well-being. In fact, an article in the New England Journal of Medicine demonstrated just how powerful your social network can be. A study of 12,067 people over a 32-year period shows that subjects were more likely to become obese when their friends became obese. The opposite is true when good habits are shared among the people around you. Make a regular practice with your right tribe to send each other gratitude messages. It could be through weekly texts or emails.

### Purpose

There is so much to be said about feeling gratitude, but did you know it can also help you clarify your life purpose? For most, purpose is found in serving others and the more grateful we feel, the more likely we are to do so. Not only does it produce a feeling of gratitude in the person being helped, but it also often produces an innate feeling to somehow return the favor or pay it forward in one way or another. After all, gratitude begets gratitude.

*Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida’s well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, visit [southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](http://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).*

### Online Power Nine activity of the week

There are many benefits of practicing gratitude and people who regularly practice gratitude experience more positive emotions, feel more alive, sleep better, express more compassion and kindness, and can even have stronger immune systems.

As you go about your week, take time to reflect on all the things that you are truly grateful for. Share these with us by commenting or by tagging us on Facebook @Blue Zones Project—Southwest Florida, or you can email us at [bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com](mailto:bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com) to be entered in our prize drawing for a gift card from one of our Blue Zones Project Approved Restaurants.