

# BLUE ZONES

“Every human being is the author of his own health or disease.” – Buddha



June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month. PROVIDED PHOTO

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By **Sebastien Saitta** Blue Zones Project-Southwest Florida

As we recognize Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month, it's important to consider ways to keep your brain functioning at its very best so you can live a long, healthy life.

The Blue Zones Power 9, a set of principles followed by the world's longest-lived people, provides an easy to follow way to give your brain the boost it needs to think, act and live well.

### 1. Move Naturally

Your mind and body are intimately connected and the way you move can directly affect the way you feel. The world's longest-lived people aren't necessarily in the gym for hours on end running on a treadmill or lifting weights.

Instead, they do mild exercise with simple movements often without even thinking about it. This includes activities like walking, gardening, or doing house chores. In fact, a 2018 study in PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences) revealed that mild exercise resulted in elevated activity in regions of the brain known to support detailed memory processing.

### 2. Purpose

Okinawans call it *ikigai* or “reason for being” and Costa Ricans call it “*plan de vida*.” Knowing your sense of purpose can impact your brain in a big way! A 2012 study by researchers at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center at Rush University Medical Center suggests that purpose in life protects against the harmful effects of plaques and tangles on memory and other thinking abilities. This can be significant in promoting healthy aging of the brain.

### 3. Down Shift

Just breathe. We know that long-term stress raises cortisol levels that can affect our heart health and cause inflammation leading to other health problems. Did you know that according to a 2012 Yale study, chronic stress also greatly affects thinking and memory and can even shrink your brain? This makes the need to reduce stress through down shift all that much more important. Down shift strategies include meditation, yoga, deep breathing exercises, naps and light exercise.

### 4. 80% Rule

“*Hara hachi bu!*” Okinawans use this term to remind them to stop eating when their stomachs are 80 percent full. The 20 percent gap between not being hungry and feeling full could be the difference between maintaining proper weight or gaining it. A 2018 study published in *Cureus Journal of Medical Science* suggests that a high BMI increases the risk for dementia due to bioactive hormonal compounds that are secreted by adipose tissue.

### 5. Plant Slant

Mom was right when she told you to “eat your veggies.”

Among the many health benefits of loading your plate with plant-based foods, new research published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* finds that following a diet rich in plant-based foods and low in animal products during midlife is associated with a significantly lower risk of cognitive impairment later in life.

### 6. Wine @ 5

That's right! There's even more reason to drink wine, in moderation of course. It can be good for your brain! A new study, which appears in the journal *Scientific Reports*, shows that low levels of alcohol consumption tamp down inflammation and helps the brain clear away toxins, including those associated with Alzheimer's disease.

### 7. Belong

Belonging to a faith-based community has many benefits that include a sense of peace, support and acceptance.

Did you also know that studies show that spiritual practices can be good for the brain since they have considerable antidepressant effects due to the associated increase in serotonin and dopamine? Amen to that!

### 8. Family First

Good family relationships and keeping family first can make us feel safe, loved, and provide a sense of belonging. This in turn reduces stress and elevates the feel-good chemicals in our brain.

### 9. Right Tribe

Having meaningful friendships and spending time with the right people is one of the greatest joys in life. Even better, a 2017 report from AARP's Global Council on Brain Health shows that having a vibrant social life may slow cognitive decline as you age. Pick up that phone, call your friends and join them for a cup of coffee or wine @ 5!

Learn more ways to incorporate the Power 9 in your own life, worksite, church, HOA, school, restaurant, or grocery store by visiting [BlueZonesProject.com](http://BlueZonesProject.com).