

# BLUE ZONES

“A healthy outside starts from the inside.” – Robert Urich

## Work on improving your sleep in March, National Sleep Awareness Month



Sleep is incredibly important for your health, and is just as important as eating healthy and exercising. Unfortunately, sleep deprivation is increasing, with Americans sleeping about two hours less each night than they did a century ago. GETTY IMAGES

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March is National Sleep Awareness Month, the perfect time to implement healthy sleep habits and think about what you can do to get a good night's rest.

Sleep is incredibly important for your health, and is just as important as eating healthy and exercising. Unfortunately, sleep deprivation is increasing with Americans sleeping about two hours less each night than they did a century ago. In fact, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that about one-third of U.S. adults sleep less than the recommended seven hours daily.

While not specifically a Blue Zones Power 9 (a set of principles shared by the longest-lived and healthiest people in the world), it is no coincidence that better sleep is directly impacted by each of these principles.

Discover how you can bring each Power 9 into your life to get the sleep your body needs:

**The 80% Rule:** The longest-lived people in the world use this rule to stop eating when their stomachs are 80 percent full. Not only does this prevent unnecessary weight gain that can contribute to poor sleep, but practicing this rule at dinner gives you more time to digest which frees up your body's resources needed for deeper sleep.

**Belong:** Belonging to a faith-based community has many benefits that include a sense of peace, support, and acceptance. But did you know that it can also help you sleep better? A study published in Sleep Health Journal of the National Sleep Foundation found that people who were religiously involved were more likely to get at least seven

hours of sleep per night and are more likely to report sound sleep quality.

**Plant Slant:** A growing body of research suggests that the foods you eat can impact your sleep. Many chemicals, amino acids, enzymes, and nutrients found in a plant-based diet not only help you fall asleep, but also stay asleep more throughout the night. Try eating more foods like kale and collards which contain calcium needed for better sleep. Also, bananas well-known for being rich in potassium, are also a good source of Vitamin B6, which is needed to make melatonin (a sleep-inducing hormone triggered by darkness).

**Down Shift:** It is no secret that stress and physical tension are major roadblocks for proper shut-eye. Practicing down shift or relaxation techniques is one of the best ways of reducing activity of stress hormones. Look into activities like yoga, Tai chi, or meditation to help you find that inner calm and ultimately lead to better sleep.

**Move Naturally:** Move your way to a more restful sleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation, as little as 10 minutes of aerobic exercise, such as walking, cycling, or even gardening can dramatically improve the quality of your nighttime sleep, especially when done on a regular basis.

**Purpose:** Elders from Nicoya, Costa Rica (an original Blue Zones) call it the “plan de vida,” or reason to live which propels their positive outlook and contributes to their longevity. New research from the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago suggests using the discovery of your purpose as a drug-free sleep therapy. The study revealed that people who felt a sense of purpose had a 63 percent lower chance of developing sleep apnea and a 52 percent lower risk of restless legs syndrome that con-

tribute to insomnia.

**Loved Ones First, Right Tribe, Friends @ Five:** These three principles have to do with the quality of our social relationships and spending time with those we love. Studies show that the company we keep by day may determine how well we sleep at night. This applies to all different ages. A three-year longitudinal study published in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence found a statistically significant, bidirectional association between better sleep and social ties among college students. More positive social ties led to more effective emotion regulation, which, in turn, led to less sleep problems.

Another study from the School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, found that older teens — those over 16.3 years old — who spent several hours face to face with their family had 4% more efficient sleep than those who spent less time with their family. The same study found that younger adolescents who spent more time interacting with friends had higher sleep efficiency.

Blue Zones Project offers free Power 9 activities like Purpose Workshops, Yoga, Tai Chi, a Move Naturally Fitness Series, Friendship Moais, Plant Slant cooking demonstrations, and more. Go to [BlueZonesProjectSW-FL.Eventbrite.com](https://www.BlueZonesProjectSW-FL.Eventbrite.com) to sign up.

*Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is a vital 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](https://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).*