

The Big Know

As I said at the end of the last lesson, we've been able to distill our research from the Blue Zones into nine key elements to healthy living. And we call them the Power 9. In this lesson, I'm going to walk you through each of the Power 9.

And let's start at the top, with the concept of natural movement. It might surprise you, but most of the world's longest lived people didn't exercise. They didn't belong to gyms. They didn't pump iron or run marathons. Instead, they live in environments that constantly nudge them into moving.

In America, it's the opposite. We're continually engineering movement out of our lives. Our veggies come pre-chopped, prepackaged, and pre-cooked, if at all. We can control the temperature of our homes, the channel on the TV, the lighting in the upstairs hallways, all from the comfort of our La-Z-Boy recliner.

But even with, or perhaps as a result of, all these awesome conveniences, we're still leaving those 12 years on the table. Many of us try to get movement into our lives. We join gyms or perhaps we spend an hour in spin classes or hit the elliptical hard for 30 minutes. But once that session is done, we're right back in our chairs.

In our Blue Zones, movement just happens. Exercise just happens. In Okinawa, for example, they sit on the floor. These 100-year-old Okinawa women are getting up and down 30 or 40 times a day. That's as good as doing squats.

Sardinians live in these vertical houses and towns. They're up and down stairs all day long, without even thinking about it. Every trip to the store, or to church, or to a friend's house, occasions a walk, and often a hilly walk at that. They don't have as many conveniences. There's no button to push for yard work or another one to push for housework. If they want to mix bread, they're doing it by hand.

That's physical activity. That burns calories, just as much as going to the gym over time. And when they do intentional physical activity, it's the things they enjoy. They tend to walk a lot. And walking is a proven way to stave off cognitive decline.

So I'd like to take you on a quick journey through my home and I want to share three, what I call deconveniencing strategies I've employed to promote natural movement in my life. These are simple things I like to think most of us can do. They might hurt at first because we've gotten so accustomed to our modern conveniences. But I want to give them just a try, just to see what happens.

I'm guessing that once you start with these basic ideas, pretty soon you'll start seeing little changes you can make

all over the place, to add natural movement into your life. These little tweaks add up, maybe two calories here, or three calories here. But they also keep your metabolism burning higher. And before you even realize it, you're moving a lot more, burning more calories, and improving health in the process.

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So one of the big secrets we learned by studying the world's largest-lived people in Blue Zones is about 90% of their dietary intake comes from plants. And we know that people who eat mostly a plant-based diet have much lower rates of diabetes, much lower rates of heart disease, lower rates of cancer, and they weigh less, about 20 pounds less.

Now, whether or not you eat mostly plants is driven by a few things. Number one, do you believe it's good for you? Number two, do you actually like plants? Can you make them taste good? And number three, is your kitchen set up in such a way that it's easy to prepare them?

So what I'm going to do here in this little segment is show you my four basic tools to make plants tastes good and also move naturally. First one here is a cutting board. I like them heavy. I like them beautiful, so I'll keep it out. And I like them big, so I have lots of space.

Another big investment I make-- and I'll spend a hundred bucks on a really high quality knife that will stay sharp. The most dangerous tool in your kitchen is a dull knife. So you want a good sharp knife.

Also, if you want to scale your cutting work, a mandolin like this costs about \$10 bucks. You put your carrots or your onions or your potatoes and just slide up and down, slice to the right size. And then for another 10 bucks you get one of these babies right here, a grater for your carrots or your cabbage. Every time you're using this you're burning two or three calories.

The point here is if you're doing it by hand instead of trying to do it with some electronic gadget, you're going to burn more calories every time you cook a meal. Some of us cook three meals a day. You add that up. That could be more physical activity than the average American gets going to the gym.

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I know that a rocker recliner can feel like heaven at times. But it's not doing your health many favors. In the Blue Zones of Okinawa, everyone sits on the floor, and it pays off. Getting up and down from the floor 20, 30 times a day strengthens your thighs and your glutes. And it even gives you better balance, so you're less likely to fall down and break your hip or injure yourself. You'll also be supporting yourself without a chair back, which improves your posture and can burn additional calories mindlessly. Take that, La-Z-Boy.

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Most centenarians I met in Blue Zones maintain their own gardens, growing fruits, herbs, and vegetables, that they'll end up using in their own home and their own cooking. Getting outside in the fresh air for weeding, pruning, watering, and picking is an essential element of their daily routines. Not only does this promote natural movement, but there's a therapeutic aspect to it as well. And I'd like to recommend a garden for each and every one of you.

But I live in Minneapolis. And that's not an excuse not to grow a garden in the summer. But there's snow on the ground right now. And for a good chunk of the year, daily gardening is simply out of reach. That's why I like house plants so much. They clean the air. They add a splash of color to the place. And they give me something to care for, no matter what's going on outside.

Research has shown all sorts of health benefits for people who regularly care for their plants, believe it or not. They're like pets that don't get hair all over the place. If you put plants throughout your house, along your everyday pathways, just the sight of them will nudge you into taking care of them. And the act of watering your plants every day is another great and simple way to burn a few extra calories as you go.

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So that was a lot on natural movement. It's such an essential part of Blue Zones' living. And now you're exposed to the concept, I'm certain you'll start to see opportunities all over the place to make little changes in your world to promote more movement in your life. But let's look at the rest of the Power 9.