

Live to 101 years old



Thanks to this woman and her exceedingly long lifespan, we don't have to work on Monday morning.

Wayne Hiebert / Canwest File Photo

Ben Kaplan, National Post · Sunday, May 17, 2009

Long weekend tomfoolery is intimately tied to one woman's exceedingly long lifespan. Think about it: if not for Queen Victoria's steadfast (and record-breaking) sixty-three years and seven months on the throne, all of us would be schlepping to work Monday morning. Of course, during Victoria's reign in the heady 1800s, there was no one to guide her toward healthy lifestyle choices. (In those grey days before Oprah, why would anyone pen a self-help book?) But a lot of the decisions Queen Victoria implicitly made factor heavily in Dan Buettner's spirited new best-seller *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest*. According to Buettner, each of us are capable of living long healthy lives well into our centenarian years — if we're willing to make some concessions.

"Living longer and feeling better is the sum of a few small easy choices you can incorporate into everyday life," says Buettner, who travelled the world investigating places like Okinawa, Japan and Nicoya, Costa Rica, where residents lived longer than average lifespans. What Buettner discovered was a few steadfast rules. "Want to live longer? Spend time with family, watch what you eat, do the physical activities which bring you the most joy and connect to your faith," Buettner says.

According to scientists, 25% of our lifespan is determined by genes. Which means the other 75%, fortunately or not as we embark on the long weekend, is determined by lifestyle choices. What are some other tips Buettner gleaned from interviewing dozens of people who've lived well into their 90s, and even into their 100s? We consulted his book and then asked him — and a few of his 100-year-old friends — to help us come up with *The Queen Victoria Tributary: 101 Ways to Live to be 100 years old*.

101. Practice moderation. This isn't rocket science. Even Brussels sprouts become deadly when you're mainlining them a dozen at a time.

100. You see, you can have chocolate, foie gras and even the odd Du Maurier as long as you practice portion control.

99. "Port wine, olive oil and a sense of humour," 122-year-old Jeanne Calment's three rules for living a long, happy life.

98. Experience nature. A hike through the woods is better for you than two hours at the gym.

97. Still, even the worst gym work-out is better than an afternoon in front of your computer. Everyday, try and do something active.

96. Eat a light meal for supper.

95. And, dear God, forgo fast food. (Even a Wendy's salad can't compare with something grown in your own backyard).

94. "Start a garden!" implores Dan Buettner, who says that was the first thing he told his bacon-addicted 73-year-old dad.

93. A garden not only provides fresh, organic vegetables, but it also gives us a purpose. Through weeding, watering and watching something develop, we have something healthy to look forward to.
92. Having a purpose in life is a proven link to living longer. What's the most likely demographic to live past 100? Women who've had children after 40.
91. Not that we're particularly suggesting all women over 40 should go out and have kids.
90. That said, sexual intercourse is a terrific exercise.
89. A lean, plant-based diet accented with meat is much healthier than the typical North American diet. Eat your veggies.
88. Okinawa, Japan has the greatest concentration of healthy centenarians. What is 104-year-old Ushi Okushima's tips for a long, happy life? "Stop worrying about getting something in your future and worrying about what you missed in your past," she says in The Blue Zones. "Living in the present, more than anything, keeps you young."
87. Okushima also says to celebrate your elders. Remember, Father's Day is coming up!
86. Choose fish over red meat. Most of the healthiest diets eschew meat altogether, but we'll just recommend upping your fish protein intake and lowering your beef and pork.
85. Especially salmon.
84. We know it isn't easy. Buettner says bacon is the one thing his father won't quit.
83. Associate with like-minded people. If you hang out all day at buffets with alcoholic chain-smoking food addicts, odds are you won't be walking thirty minutes a day.
82. Get your flavonoids. Found in red wine, brightly coloured fruits and vegetables and dark chocolate, this secondary plant metabolite reduces rates of cancer and heart disease.
81. Eat soy. It's found in edamame and tofu, and it's painless.
80. "I grew up on a farm in Alberta and never much cared to drink the secretions of cow," says Dr. Ellsworth Wareham. We always thought a glass of milk was healthy, but Dr. Wareham is 94 years old and, when we spoke to him, he'd just completed eight hours of cardiac surgery. As the surgeon.
79. Take in a healthy dose of vitamin D from the sun.
78. And what of Canadians, people in Saskatchewan and Manitoba who have just come through one of the coldest winters in years? Think SAD lamps. Available at orientationsnova.com, a Canadian company doing innovative work with seasonal affective disorder and light therapy for the past eight years.
77. Don't be so paranoid about carbs. In Sardinia, Italy, one of Buettner's designated Blue Zones, the shepherds mostly ate bread.
76. They also have cheese. Which, as any Frenchwoman will tell you, can be the elixir of life.
75. "None of us know how to live a long life, it wouldn't be fair if we did," says Marge Jenner, 105, from her home in Loma Linda, Calif. "My granddaughter goes out of her way to make me happy. Sometimes I feel guilty for taking up her time. She should live a really long life."
74. Marge Jenner has been a vegetarian for the past 60 years and when you get her on the phone, it's hard to ask her too many questions because she spends most of the conversation asking about you. "All I can say is thanks God for all he's given me," Jenner says. "I just got over hip surgery and look forward to taking my walk."
73. "You want to know my big secret for living a long life?" she asks. "Not hurrying. You young folks hurry too much these days."
72. Family may be the other big secret for living a long life. 95% of the people in Sardinia who lived to be more than 100 had a daughter or granddaughter caring for them.
71. The fatty acids in goat milk helps prevent atherosclerosis and Alzheimer's disease.
70. Goat's milk also contains 13% more calcium, 25% more vitamin B, 47% more vitamin A and 134% more potassium than cow's milk. It's also good in soup.

69. Still, go easy on the salt. It contributes to high blood pressure and weakens arteries.
68. Go see a doctor. "As the Chinese say, you can't treat a disease until you put a name on it," says Buettner. "Get yourself checked out so you know where you stand."
67. Since Buettner has been so helpful to us, we'll also plug his website, bluezones.com. On the site, there's a checklist for measuring your estimated life span. If smoking knocks off six years of your life, walking everyday can add another two years. All sorts of handy algorithms are available on the site.
66. "Eat until you are 80% full." This just plum makes sense.
65. Make your house less mechanically inclined.
64. This means manually opening your garage door, shovelling your driveway and whisking the flour in your cakes. Even the six calories you'll burn opening a can of tuna helps.
63. Leave the car at home.
62. Cut down on stress. Remember that line from Alice in Wonderland? "The hurrier I go the behinder I get." Think about that. Because it's true.
61. Friendships, like wine, also relieve stress. It's healthy to vent.
60. Turmeric, found in spicy curries and mustard, has antioxidants that are an easy defense against inflammatory ailments.
59. Follow a sports team. It's nice to have something to cheer for.
58. Just as long as that "something" isn't the Maple Leafs. People die over broken hearts.
57. Eat nuts -- a simple way to add at least three years to your life expectancy.
56. And no, it doesn't matter what kind of nuts you eat. They help cut down the risk of heart disease.
55. Don't forget about vitamin S -- a smile. And not only because a happier person experiences less stress but, according to Buettner, a person's likability makes a huge difference in not only the help you'll receive in the health care system, but also from family and friends. Think of being nice to people as a cheap insurance policy.
54. How does a person become "nice"? "Remember names, ask questions of people rather than droning on about your life and don't complain," Buettner says. "If you're generous, you'll be well-liked. There are measurable returns that come from friendships with regards to good health."
53. Be positive. When you get down, remember: a super-centenarian is a person aged 110 and over. Their numbers have climbed since the 80s. Odds are, you're going to be here awhile. May as well enjoy.
52. Which basically means, "embrace your ikigai," as they say in Japan. "Ikigai" is your reason to get up every morning.
51. And everyone should drink water. Men who drink five or six glasses a day are 70% less likely to suffer fatal heart attacks.
50. Reduce the noise around you. And this doesn't just mean lowering the volume on your TV. Simplify everything.
49. Organic wheat grass has been known to work wonders.
48. And gluten-free foods, like the kind found on the Canadian Celiac Association website, celiac.ca, are much healthier than the stuff you find at the grocery store.
47. By all means, maintain social connections. Queen Victoria began her decline after the death of her husband. Who knows? The long weekend could have stretched out through Wednesday had he lasted a few more years.
46. Please stop smoking. Tobacco-related ailments remain the most preventable causes of death and disease in North America.
45. "My mantra is do what you enjoy," Buettner says. "If you're not liking something, whether it's your workout or your gluten-free diet, 98% of people won't keep something up. Find the things that adhere to you."
44. Like gardening. Both Marge Jenner and Dan Buettner spoke so effusively about the power of having a green thumb, that we hereby abdicate every National Post reader maintains some kind of green space. It pays dividends.

43. Don't be afraid of mugwort. It may sound like something out of Harry Potter, but this wild weed used to flavour teas has proven medicinal effects.
42. Volunteer. Because it's not only how long we live, but what the life we live is actually like. Give something back. You will grow.
41. Dr. Ellsworth Wareham is truly inspirational. He recently relaid his backyard fence. "I think it's important for me to keep active," he says. "People say, 'I don't drive at night.' Well, I drive over 2,000 miles a month on Southern California freeways, much of it at night. It keeps me alert." Again, Dr. Wareham is a heart surgeon. The 94-year-old drives home after operating on the hearts of younger men.
40. Mental acuity is closely tied to physical health. Whether it's online Scrabble or Sudoku, keep the tools sharp.
39. One centenarian in Costa Rica suggests reciting a few stanzas of poetry every night. From memory, she can recite a six-minute Pablo Neruda poem.
38. Breakfast should be your day's largest meal, then lunch, and then dinner. Portion-size should decrease through the course of the day.
37. In Nicoya, Costa Rica, the average 60-year-old has twice the chance of reaching 90 than people in Canada, France or even Japan. Luis Rosero-Bixby has studied their population. "The people here have very liberal attitudes toward sex," Rosero-Bixby says in *The Blue Zones*. "They tend to have many sexual partners throughout life."
36. They also eat three times as many limes.
35. Sleep tightly. Sleep is what keeps the immune system functioning. Adults need between seven and nine hours a night.
34. "Moderate drinkers outlive teetotalers," says Buettner. "You guys have a long weekend in Canada? You should drink!"
33. "Moderately," Buettner adds.
32. Everyone knows oranges have high vitamin C content. But did you know they also prevent heart disease, cancer and strokes?
31. But you have to eat them, not drink 'em.
30. If you're going to take vitamins, find something with calcium. The heart is a muscle, and calcium makes our muscles strong. It also helps with bone strength. Hip fractures are one of the leading causes of death amongst seniors.
29. Dedicate yourself to something for five weeks and the practice becomes a habit. Start living healthier now, and your odds of living longer will have increased by Father's Day.
28. Introduce balancing exercises into your workouts. (One in every three adults over 65 experiences a fall each year). It's never too early to train. And it can be as easy as standing on one foot every day.
27. Yoga also helps improve balance.
26. Not to mention that joining a yoga studio, cycling club or gym will also increase your social network.
25. Take care of your teeth. They're one of the most important parts of your digestive system and can easily be maintained with regular brushing, flossing and trips to the dentist.
24. Also, eat sardines. They're loaded with omega 3 fatty acids and offer high levels of Coenzyme Q10, which is a powerful antioxidant known to promote a strong immune system.
23. Choose healthy hobbies. Even two hours of bowling can burn 490-calories -- and two hours of dancing burns more than that!
22. Your goal should be to get in the habit of at least 30 minutes of exercise at least five times a week. And exercise does include walking.
21. Losing 10% of body weight will lower blood pressure and cholesterol, thus reducing the risk of heart disease. Have we mentioned how important it is to practice portion control?
20. Also, put a scale in your bathroom. One study showed that women who weighed themselves daily lost an average of 12-pounds a year.

19. But don't for one minute think you have to give up red wine. Red wine contains artery-scrubbing polyphenols that fight against arteriosclerosis.
18. Just don't get behind the wheel after drinking. That greatly reduces the effectiveness of the previous 83 tips.
17. Eat four to six vegetable servings every day. And if you can get down tofu, even better.
16. Learn a new language or how to play an instrument. People are purpose-driven.
15. Adopting a pet will also give life meaning. Having something to care for makes us want to live.
14. Go slow. "People who've made it to 100 seem to exude a sense of sublime serenity," Buettner says. Take naps. Taste your food. Don't eat in front of the television.
13. Basically, stop and smell the roses. Preferably ones that you've grown.
12. Arriving fifteen minutes early to every appointment helps to minimize stress. (And no, I didn't just put that in there for my wife).
11. Carry your clubs on the golf course and fore-go escalators for stairs. Make slight lifestyle alterations as opposed to a series of massive changes all at once.
10. And furthermore, don't try all of these things today. Buettner suggests only taking on any three tips at a time. (Maybe four if you're experimenting over the long weekend).
9. Pick up *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest*. It is a pretty damned inspiring book.
8. "I don't know what you young people believe, but I couldn't imagine life without God," says Marge Jenner, our 105-year-old Californian. Most research suggests having a belief-system is healthy. Whatever that belief-system may be.
7. Eat cooked corn. It's loaded with calcium (as is broccoli, kale and cheese).
6. Do something nice for somebody else. Who knows? Maybe they'll give you cooked corn.
5. "I had a sit-down with my dad about his bacon-eating habits and, believe me, they're hard to change," Buettner says. Expect these changes to be gradual. No one lived to be 101 overnight.
4. In two years, 98% of people on diets run back to their previous eating habits. Make real lifestyle changes. Don't let these tips become fads.
3. Hail the power of the sweet potato! High in fiber, vitamin A, potassium, vitamin C and folic acid, they're also easy to make.
2. Dark chocolate is another treat which, when not eaten in a massive Chris Farley-sized binge, doesn't have to be denied. (It has more antioxidants than milk).
1. "You've got to have piece of mind," Dr. Ellsworth says. "I was a navy officer on a destroyer in the Pacific during World War II and that taught me something: I don't have stress in my life. If you watch your diet and exercise, well, I don't see any reason why all sorts of people can't live just as long as me."

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