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THINGS YOU MUST DO TO LIVE LONGER BETTER & HAPPIER

Canva



Nowadays, there is so much clutter in the media about health, diet and supplements that it is near to impossible to differentiate the right from the wrong, the hype from the truth. We see the morning show on TV and there is someone telling us that drinking green tea twice a day can help us prevent cancer! Then there is somebody on the other side of the planet who tells us that the secret to a long life and a great skin lies in eating an organic diet. Cut down on your dairy intake, don't eat carbs after 7.30 pm, do yoga, eat tofu, do this, do that - phew!!

What if we wanted to keep things simple? What if we wanted to cut through all the noise and get down to the basics - create a lifestyle that will give us a healthy and happy life as a by-product! It is now established that our genes define only 10% of our health condition. The balance 90% is defined by our environment, by our diet and lifestyle choices.

Genes load the gun, but the environment pulls the trigger - Dr. Francis Collins, director of the US National Institutes of Health


The starting point for this write-up comes from knowing and reading about the lives of people from an island in Greece - Ikaria. This place has been attributed with various titles like '[The island where people forget to die](#)' or '[The island of long life](#)'. Ikaria is blessed with a population figure that consists of many people above the age of 90 years leading a healthy and active life. They don't spend billions of dollars annually on health supplements and neither do they know about the celebrity diets. Going to the gym thrice a week and throwing in some yoga and deep breathing exercises is not their idea of maintaining the perfect physique! Rather, it's the way they have simplified their lives to include a lot of natural movement, healthy diet and a close knit social circle that has contributed to their longevity.

Of course, it is not possible to replicate the same model for people like us who live in cities, but there is definitely a lot that we can learn from these people and imbibe into our daily lives. At a deeper level, we do know what is it that we are doing right and what are the mistakes that we are making. Its just that our habits are so tightly ingrained into our systems, that we find it hard to get into a new routine.

Well, the good news is that as per science, our bodies are designed to live till an average age of 90. That's quite a lot! The very fact that you have continued reading till here means that you do care about your health and wellness and the below 10 pointers will definitely help you move along the path of longevity and a better quality of life.

A Plant Based Diet

Well, whether you like it or not, you do have to cut down on your meat and dairy intake if you wish to start your journey towards a healthier life. People from Ikaria mostly eat stuff that they grow locally & their diet also includes a good dose of whole wheat bread, goat's milk, olive oil & herbal tea.



*A plant based diet and 7-8
glasses of water!*

Plant based diet is based on whole grains, fruits, vegetables, tubers and legumes. One will have to cut down on the intake of meat, eggs, dairy products and refined food items like oil, sugar and bleached flour.

Eating a plant based diet does not imply that we need to be eating huge portions of green leafy vegetables throughout the day. In fact, this is one of the biggest myths about a plant based diet. Leafy vegetables are quite low in terms of calorie content and a diet that consists mainly of leafy vegetables will not be able to provide us with sufficient energy to sustain us throughout the day. This is where the tubers & starchy vegetables like potatoes, corn and sweet potatoes come in. In fact, tubers & starchy food, whole grains and legumes will be in the forefront of your plant based diet and will have to be supported by fruits and leafy vegetables.

Benefits: lower your risk for many serious disorders.

Rich fruits' diet lowers your risk of developing high blood pressure, a condition that over time can seriously damage cardiovascular system.



FRUITS

mangoes, bananas, grapes, strawberries, blueberries, oranges, cherries, etc.

Benefits: vital for health and maintenance of your body.

Rich vegetables provide a source of many nutrients, including potassium, fiber, folate (folic acid) and vitamins A, E and C.



VEGETABLES

lettuce, collard greens, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, carrots, etc.

Benefits: denser in calories than others. **TUBERS & STARCHY VEGETABLES**

Rich fruits' diet lowers your risk of developing high blood pressure, a condition that over time can seriously damage cardiovascular system.



potatoes, yams, yucca, winter squash, corn, green peas, etc.

Benefits: prevent heart disease, cancer, & diabetes.

Whole grains have some valuable antioxidants not found in fruits & vegetables, as well as B vitamins, vitamin E, magnesium, iron & fiber.



WHOLE GRAINS

millet, quinoa, barley, rice, whole wheat, oats, etc.

Benefits: improve your blood cholesterol.

Legumes are high in minerals and fiber without the saturated fat found in some animal proteins.



LEGUMES

kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, lima beans, cannellini beans, black beans, etc.

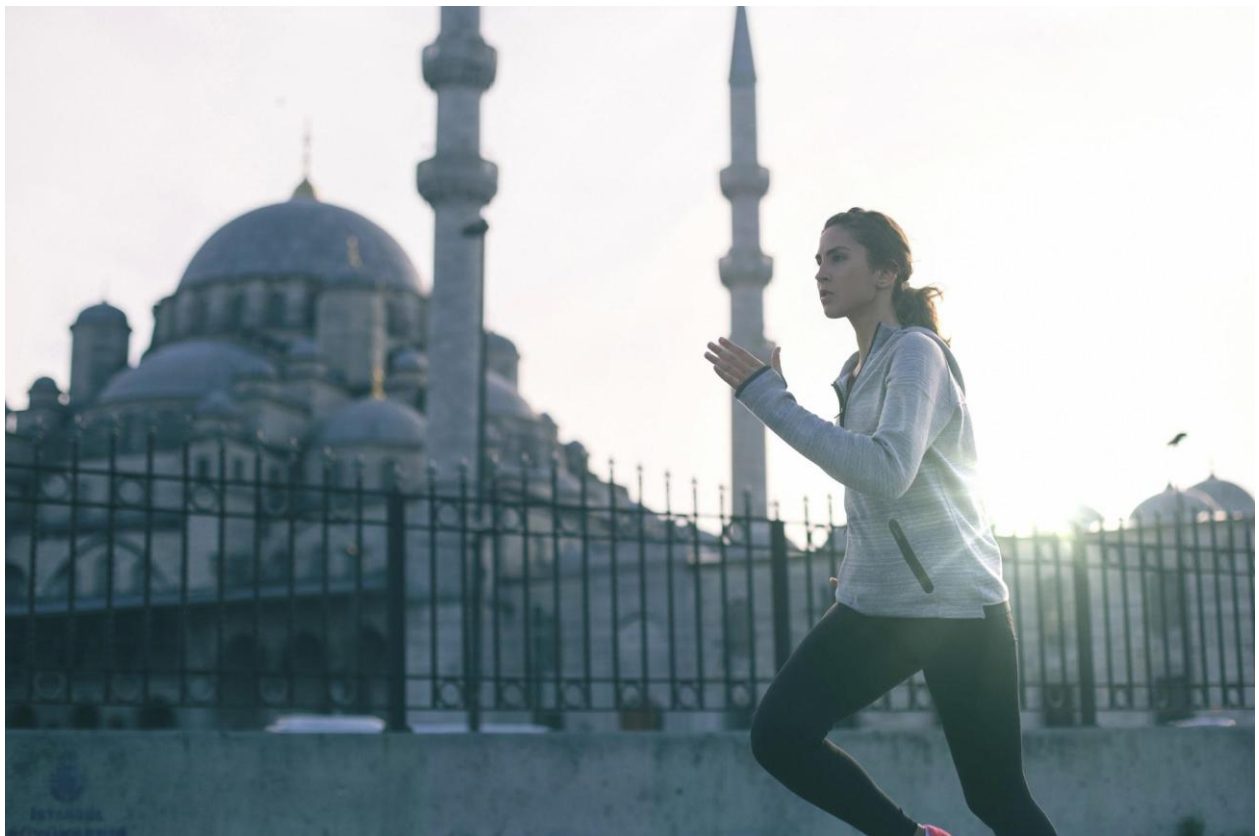
The key here is to understand that one need not single out any food item for a particular nutritional requirement, like milk for calcium. We must include a variety of plant based food items and rest assured, you will be meeting all of your nutritional requirement. So go ahead, find out interesting plant based recipes and take the first, most important step towards a healthier life!

Also, a healthy diet is incomplete if you do not drink enough water during the day. Make sure to drink at least 7-8 glasses of water a day. Of course, individual needs may vary depending upon the climate you live in or the level of physical activity you do. Still, if are consciously drinking 7-8 glasses of water a day, you should be in a safe zone.

Regular Physical Activity

The Ikarians, living in a rugged terrain, don't exercise in the typical way that we are used to. Instead, their lifestyle is structured such that they have a lot of natural movement in their daily lives - like working in their vineyards and gardens or herding their own goats for milk and cheese.

Whereas, if we were to look at our lives - the level of physical activity has reduced drastically. If we were to look at our grandparents, being physically active - they managed to burn more calories than us without consciously exercising. As we age, our metabolism slows down and thus we need to eat less and move more in order to maintain the energy balance.



Typically, we need at least 2.5 hours of physical activity every week. Also, rather than trying to achieve this entire figure in a day, it is advised that one must exercise 3 to 4 times a week to meet our weekly goals. Also, it is up to us to decide what kind of physical activity suits our body to most and create a plan around that. Let's take a look at the Top 5 Exercise Options available that we can easily integrate into our daily lives and their benefits:

1. **Walking** - Walking definitely has to be on top of the list as it's the safest and most inexpensive forms of all exercises. All you need is a pair of comfortable, well fitting shoes and you are ready to go! Walking helps you keep in shape as well as assist you in reducing the risk of many diseases like blood pressure, diabetes and heart diseases. It also apt for people of all ages and health conditions. The goal should be to walk about 10,000 steps a day - one easy way to measure the number of steps you take in a day is the [Runtastic Pedometer & Run Counter](#) app for android users. There are similar apps for Iphone users as well; you can see what works best for you.

2. **Running** - Nowadays, everyone is running marathons! In fact, you are so not in with the trends if you don't have a Facebook update with 5k or a 10k to your credit! Jokes apart, running are a great way to build stronger bones and strengthen muscles. Running is also a great way to lose calories and get in shape. Take care to run at an intensity that is a little faster than your regular pace, at least 30 minutes a week.
3. **Swimming** - Swimming is a great form of exercise for people with musculoskeletal problems. Exercising inside the water can be hugely therapeutic, especially people who are recovering from accidents or injuries. The buoyancy of water provides a great cushioning support and will help you in achieving your fitness goals without any undue stress on your bones and joints.
4. **Weight Training** - If you wish to strengthen your muscles, lifting weights is a great option available. It is advised that one must do weight training at least two times a week. Just take care to work on all the muscles of your body like your arms, thighs, waist, shoulder, knees, stomach and chest. Needless to add, you must do this under supervision and with good quality equipments.
5. **Yoga** - Last but not the least, our list will be incomplete without Yoga. Doing yoga regularly is one of the best gifts we can give to our mind, body and spirit. Yoga doesn't just work at the physical bodies; rather it works holistically to balance the body and the mind. The asanas (yoga poses), pranayama and meditation combine together to make our lives a lot more happier and fulfilling.

So take your pick. Decide what works best for you, consciously break yourself away from a sedentary lifestyle and include a lot of natural movement, including a regular exercise routine in your lives.

Bonding With Friends and Family

Diet and exercise apart, the real secret behind longevity for the people of Ikaria is in the way they have structured their societies and treat their older population. Ikarians keep the old in their family close to themselves, a practice which they believe adds more years to the lives of the elderly, and it's good for a healthy growth of the kids too.

Isolation is not a good thing. In fact all your good food and exercise routine is incomplete if you don't have a strong sense of belonging and bonding with friends and family. The kind of influence your social circle has on the quality of your life is immense:

- ✓ If you hang around five confident people, you will be the sixth.
- ✓ If you hang around five intelligent people, you will be the sixth.

- ✓ If you hang around five millionaires, you will be the sixth.
- ✓ If you hang around five idiots, you will be the sixth.
- ✓ If you hang around five broke people, you will be the sixth.
- ✓ It's inevitable.

-- Source: The [Entrepreneur](#)

So, be wise in choosing the people you spend time with, but once you find them - VALUE them. Make sure to take time out from your busy schedules and be with them and most importantly - love your parents and give them the support and care they deserve.



Being Out In The Sun - I am sure you must have noticed how being out on a bright and sunny day uplifts your mood instantly. This happens with most of us - it's really difficult to stay in a bad mood on such occasions. But a good mood is not all that you get from an exposure to the sun.

Sunlight is extremely important to maintain Vitamin D levels in our body - the shortage of which can lead to a host of diseases like cancer, deterioration in bone health, osteoporosis, diabetes, cardiovascular and immune diseases.

Our parents never had to bother about Vitamin D, also called the "sunshine vitamin". Their lifestyle allowed them to get enough of it naturally from the sun. But the



times that we live in now - getting Vitamin D from the sun is something that needs to be included in our daily 'To-do' lists. Try to spend 10-15 minutes daily in the sun during the summers and allow your skin to produce this much needed vitamin.

The amount of time that one needs to spend in the sunlight may vary depending upon different skin type and the time of the day you are exposing yourself to the sun. Some people may even be advised to take supplements. So next time you visit your doctor - do ask him the best way for you to get this essential Vitamin. But whatever you do - make sure you maintain optimum levels of the "sunshine vitamin" in your body.

Get Adequate Sleep - We all know too well what a good night's sleep can do to us. We wake up feeling refreshed, energetic and are more active throughout the day. But apart from affecting how we feel, sleep has a good amount of influence over our immune system, metabolism, memory - sleep, in fact, affects all our vital functions. About a third of our lives are spent sleeping and one cannot deny the important role a well regulated sleep routine has on our health and longevity.



People of Ikaria are known to take an afternoon nap every day, it's a part of their culture - something that everybody is expected to do on a daily basis. The island literally goes dead during those few hours in the afternoon!

Make sure to get at least 6-8 hours good quality sleep during the night. Also, keep a regular sleep pattern, i.e; try going to sleep about the same time every night. Our bodies go through a lot of stress and strain during the day - we need these hours of rest in the night, allowing our body and mind to rest, recover and repair.

Meditate - Last, but not the least on our list is, meditation. You need to meditate to allow your body, mind and spirit to slow down, to heal. Modern day lives are very hectic; there are too many things that can stress us out - from unpaid bills to the traffic on the road!



What good can a plant based diet, adequate sleep or sunlight do to us if the mind itself is agitated? It is said that most of the diseases nowadays are psychosomatic i.e, diseases that are caused by mental factors. Blood pressure, diabetes, thyroid - the three chronic diseases of our times is said to be aggravated by stress and anxiety.

The best way to beat stress and anxiety is to meditate. The rest that one derives out of meditation is much deeper than the deepest sleep one can ever have. Meditation is known to remove impurities from the mind, bringing us a lot of serenity and peace. In today's time - meditation is a necessity.

If you really are serious about your health, you must tap into the power of meditation. One of my favourite forms of meditation is [Vipassana](#). Learn from the right teacher or guru and ensure that you gradually increase and deepen your practice over time.

So, there you go! The list is ready for you - read it, implement it and share it with your friends and family. There are so many people saying so many things these days. What this guide attempts to do is to bring the focus back to the basics, to cut through the cacophony of noise. If you really are serious about your health, try to include all of the above 6 points into your daily routine. You will definitely start to see positive changes in your health and fitness levels. ***If health and happiness is one of your top priorities, do visit our blog [How I'm Building My Life for useful tips on running, yoga and self-help](#).***