

BLUE ZONES POWER 9

LOVED ONES FIRST

LA FAMILIA!

Blue Zones[®] researchers discovered that the healthiest, happiest centenarians in the world tend to build their lives around their families. Taking care of *la famiglia* is their main purpose in life. This lifelong devotion to family pays off. In Sardinia and other Blue Zones, younger generations return the love and care they received from their parents and grandparents. **Residents living in the original Blue Zones areas share common lifestyle habits called Power 9[®]—helping them live longer, healthier, happier lives. Prioritizing Family First is one of them.**



Studies show that elders who live with their families tend to eat healthier, experience less stress, and have fewer serious accidents, such as falls. They also have sharper mental and social skills than those who live alone or in an assisted care facility.

Putting Loved Ones First

Such strong family values ensure that everyone in the family, young and old, is cared for and loved. Children check on their elderly parents, and grandchildren pay daily visits to their grandparents. Often, seniors live with their families until they die.

Living together or spending time together offers a healthy advantage for the entire family, especially the elderly. Seniors get immediate care when they need it. They are directly involved in their children's and grandchildren's lives. They often help with childcare and contribute to a smoothly functioning household. This gives elders a stronger sense of purpose and belonging – both essential ingredients for longevity. They love, and they are loved in return. All of this adds up to a healthier, happier family network that supports each other.

The trend seems to be moving in the opposite direction in America. Jam-packed schedules make it a challenge for busy families to spend time together. But you can beat the trend. Create time for you and your family to be together. Share a meal at least once a day, take a vacation together every year, and get active together. Go on walks or bike rides together. It's not so much what you do; just do it together.

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Test Your Family Ties

Which activities are more likely to bring your family closer together?

- a. Sharing a meal
- b. A weekly game night
- c. Being in the same room together
- d. Visiting grandparents
- e. All of the above

The correct answer is: **e. All of the above.** Each of these activities offers an opportunity for families to be together. Even if mom and dad are preparing dinner while the kids are doing homework, just being in the same room together creates an environment of closeness.

Q & A: Ask the Expert

Q: Many of our relatives live far away. How do I instill a sense of family connectedness when we are so scattered?

A: It's not always easy to stay connected when family members are scattered. Fill in the gaps between visits with a weekly phone call. Exchange letters or e-mails often to stay in touch with one another. Video clips are a wonderful way for grandparents to keep up with their grandchildren's everyday experiences and milestones. Send grandparents care packages with your kids' drawings and schoolwork.

TOP 5 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR FAMILY A PRIORITY

Invest time and energy in your children, your spouse, and your parents. Here are some easy ways to help you build stronger bonds with your family:

- 1 Set aside time for each other every day.** Play with your children, spend quality time with your spouse, and honor your parents. Eating family dinners together is a great chance to turn off the TV and chat about everyone's day over a healthy meal.
- 2 Get moving together.** After dinner, take a walk or go on a bike ride. If you have younger children, visit your local park or playground. Or play a game of tag, Frisbee, or hide-and-seek in your own backyard.
- 3 Share your family history.** Children love stories about when their parents were young, like the time Mommy got stuck in the apple tree, or when Daddy woke up at 3:00 a.m. because he couldn't wait for Christmas morning. Display pictures of family members on a wall in your home so the kids are familiar with extended family members, too.
- 4 Involve grandparents in your lives.** Grandparents can offer love, support, wisdom, and motivation to help their younger family members succeed. This adds up to healthier, better-adjusted families who live longer.
- 5 Create family traditions and memories.** Holidays offer a great opportunity to create memorable family traditions that bring your family closer together. When it's not possible to be together during the holidays, connect by phone.

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