# Insights from Sardinia: understanding the secrets of longevity



Sardinia, the Mediterranean island renowned for its stunning coastal landscapes and vibrant villages, has garnered significant attention for its residents' remarkable longevity. Recognised as one of the six globally acknowledged 'Blue Zones', Sardinia reportedly has a higher proportion of centenarians compared to the average population of the United States.

The longevity observed in these regions is frequently attributed to a combination of lifestyle factors, including a predominantly plant-based diet, routine physical activity, and a culture that values gardening and community interactions. Dan Buettner, an explorer focused on studying Blue Zones around the world, shared his insights after conversing with locals during a visit in 2022. He discussed his reflections on a TikTok video, emphasising that achieving the milestone of 100 years is not effortlessly attainable.

"They reach extraordinary ages, largely without chronic disease," Buettner noted in his commentary. "How do they do it? Well, the truth is, we don't exactly know for sure." He elaborated that certain customary practices within the Sardinian community likely contribute to their longevity. "We know it probably involves mostly a plant-based diet, we know it probably involves a walk up and down these very steep streets every day," he said. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of family and social ties, identifying these connections as a probable key factor in promoting longevity.

During his discussions with Sardinians, Buettner encountered a 102-year-old woman whose robust family ties seemed to play a crucial role in her well-being. "She has seven nieces who take turns coming over to her house every day to make sure she gets the right food, make sure she stays mentally engaged, make sure she stays clean and make sure she has a social life," he recounted. He further shared her belief that without the support of her family, she would have passed away at least 22 years earlier.

Buettner's observations resonate with broader research findings concerning social connections and lifestyle choices that enhance cognitive health. A recent study conducted by the University of South Australia assessed the daily habits of 397 adults, seeking to determine which lifestyle choices optimise longevity. The study suggested that sedentary activities, such as excessive video gaming and television viewing, may be detrimental to cognitive functionality. Conversely, activities fostering social interactions—like conversation or communal prayer—were identified as beneficial for brain health.

This medical discourse comes at a time of rising concern regarding dementia, a term encompassing various conditions that cause cognitive decline. Recent data from the Office for National Statistics revealed that in 2023, Alzheimer’s disease and other related forms of dementia were among the leading causes of mortality in England and Wales, responsible for 66,876 deaths.

Dr Maddison Mellow, who contributed to the aforementioned study, explained, "We found that sedentary behaviours which promote mental stimulation or social engagement—such as reading or talking with friends—are beneficial for cognitive function, whereas others like watching TV or gaming have a negative effect." She emphasised that while the common guidance to "move more and sit less" holds true for overall health, a more refined perspective is necessary regarding how different sedentary behaviours influence cognitive performance.

Buettner further indicated that social circles consisting of individuals with healthier lifestyle behaviours can positively influence one’s own dietary choices. His insights aligned with findings from a Harvard study conducted in 2007, which revealed significant social impacts on obesity trends. The research demonstrated that if a person has an obese friend, their likelihood of becoming obese increases by approximately 57%, while a partner's obesity can raise the other's risk by 37%.

In light of this, Buettner suggested, "It's not a bad idea to have a vegan or vegetarian in your immediate social circle," indicating that while one need not adopt a wholly vegan lifestyle, engaging with those who prioritise a plant-based diet could lead to healthier choices and, ultimately, a longer life. He encouraged fostering connections with individuals who model these dietary habits to create an environment that promotes their benefits.

As interest in Sardinia’s longevity practices continues to expand, insights from both local residents and scientific studies highlight the complex interplay between diet, family, social ties, and overall lifestyle choices as contributors to longer, healthier lives.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://orcls.org/sardinias-blue-zone-a-haven-for-longevity/> - This article supports Sardinia's reputation as a Blue Zone with a high number of centenarians, highlighting factors such as diet, lifestyle, and community bonds that contribute to longevity.
* <https://www.bluezones.com/explorations/sardinia-italy/> - It discusses Sardinia's Blue Zone, emphasizing the island's high concentration of centenarians and the role of traditional lifestyle in achieving exceptional longevity.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_zone> - Wikipedia provides an overview of Blue Zones, including Sardinia, explaining the concept and highlighting lifestyle factors that contribute to longevity.
* <https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-aging/info-2020/blue-zones-dan-buettner.html> - This article from AARP explores Dan Buettner's research on Blue Zones, emphasizing the lifestyle choices that contribute to long, healthy lives.
* <https://www.harvard.edu/news/2007/07/26/social-connections-and-obesity-trends> - Harvard research indicates that social connections can influence obesity trends, suggesting that having friends with healthy habits can lead to healthier lifestyle choices.
* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/mortality-provisional-data-for-england-and-wales-april2023> - Office for National Statistics data highlights dementia as a leading cause of mortality, underscoring the importance of lifestyle factors in preventing cognitive decline.
* <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/health/mediterranean-island-residents-live-100-10040016> - Please view link - unable to able to access data