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## Staying Power

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Health benefits are lost when healthy traditions are forsaken.



Eating many vegetables and fruits produces better health.

## Staying Power

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

It can be a struggle to maintain healthy lifestyle habits when one is constantly bombarded with messages that promote a different eating pattern or lifestyle. However, faithfully maintaining good health habits and a healthy lifestyle over time will produce lasting benefits. There is real value in staying the course. We find that many sporting events are lost from a lack of vigilance and focus in the last segment of play.

Okinawa, Japan, boasts the longest disability-free life expectancy in the world. Heart disease rates are low. There are 80 percent fewer heart attacks in Okinawa than among Americans. Breast and prostate cancers are very rare among the older population. Obesity is equally rare. Even at age 100, the residents of Okinawa are healthy. And they are very active. They garden, they walk, and most practice traditional Okinawan dance.

The average citizen consumes at least seven servings of vegetables daily and an equal number of grains, mostly whole grains. In addition, two to four servings of fruit, plus tofu, seaweed and fish are consumed. Meat, poultry and eggs account for very little (only three percent) of their diet.

However, Okinawa may soon lose its Blue Zone\* status. Why? The modern generation of Okinawans is turning away from the traditional lifestyle and eating habits of their forefathers. The result? The younger generation of Okinawans are showing up with obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, and they are dying much younger than their parents. The reason? Big Macs and fries are now the staple meal, replacing the typical meal of tofu and a plate of greens. Fast food is a fast track to losing your health.

In the 1960s, it was reported that the inhabitants of Crete, the most southern of the Greek islands, had death rates from heart disease that were less than five percent of



the rates seen in the United States and Western Europe.

The low disease rates and longevity of Cretans was associated with their traditional diet — rich in wild greens, grains, beans, fruits, nuts, spices and olive oil, along with lots of hard, physical work.

Cretans consumed three times as many vegetables as other Europeans, and up to six times more fruit than Northern Europeans. Cucumbers, tomatoes, spinach, beans, leeks, carrots, eggplant, oranges and grapes are all grown locally on the island. The mountainous living of many

Cretans means they get a mini-workout every time they leave home. Unfortunately, we find their healthy dietary habits are changing. More and more, Cretans are regularly eating a lot more meat and fewer vegetables. Like the Okinawans, they, too, are losing their significant health advantages.

Today, we have so much evidence of how simple health habits support a quality lifestyle and extended longevity. Unfortunately, we have seen changes in commitment to the Adventist lifestyle in recent years with a greater usage of meat, wine, caffeine beverages and calorie-rich fast foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt. Such changes will diminish the health advantages of Adventists.

Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.

\* Blue Zone status is given to those communities which share nine common characteristics that promote and result in longevity. See <http://www.bluezones.com/live-longer/>.