

More Carbs for Longevity?



As you probably know by now, I've been obsessed with longevity my whole life and am always trying to stay knowledgeable about the current research regarding long and healthy lives. In my recent readings, I found some surprising new information. I couldn't believe it!

You may or may not know that there are several "pockets" of people around the world who live to their nineties and often past the age of one hundred. Researchers have begun to study them to see just what it is that makes them live such long and healthy lives. There are many aspects, of course, but the recent findings about the foods they all have in common, may surprise you.

Researchers from The University of Minnesota, teamed up with National Geographic to conduct surveys in five of these areas. They were looking for several things related to diet, but they were really interested in what foods the cultures *most* consumed.

What the team found was that no matter what culture the "centenarians" came from, they all had diets that were high in carbohydrates -- 65% seemed to be the average number. Squash and corn in Costa Rica, traditional sourdough bread, fermented with real lactobacillus cultures in Sardinia, sweet potatoes on the island of Okinawa, Japan, and oatmeal for breakfast in the Seventh Day Adventist centenarian community in America, were among the carbohydrates they found to be common.

Further still, they found that *every one* of the cultures ate one cup of beans a day. The beans that happened to be found indigenously in each culture, fava beans in sardinia, soybeans in Japan, were consumed in large quantities. I shared this tidbit with my papa, and he said, "So I can eat a bean burrito everyday?" He was joking, of course, but pinto beans were included in some of the diets.

Not surprisingly, each culture's diet was also heavy in fruits and vegetables, and meat was only

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consumed about five times a month, usually on special occasions.

The really important thing they found, however, was that it wasn't just *what* people ate, but *how* they ate it. Every culture they studied has a tradition of "breaking bread together," eating meals that take time and allow each person present, to participate somehow in the preparing of the food.

One of my favorite traditions the researchers shared, was that of the people living around Aarhus, Denmark. In the dark winters, they gather a couple times a week and sit around a table eating open-faced sandwiches and drinking wine. Before they toast each other, though, they make it a point to look into each other's eyes, creating a connection that we often miss when we're dining together.

Another account talks of women in Sardinia who get together in baking groups and bake the previously mentioned sourdough bread. They knead the bread, they chop wood for the stove, they interact and talk and connect.

You may be saying to yourself, "Yes, this sounds nice and all, but genes surely play a far bigger role than what or how you eat?"

The researchers noted that in the last ten years, the "genetic advantage" has been under scrutiny. Several studies have shown that the genetic markers of centenarians are largely the same as those of the general population, which tells us that, yes!, the way we eat can play a role in health and wellness. Some scientists have postulated that it may be the very food we eat that turns on or off the genetic markers that we inherit.

Still, sometimes even food isn't as important as the way we *feel*. A 104-year old woman from Texas began drinking three Dr. Peppers a day when she was in her sixties and when asked how she had managed to live so long she said, "...you just keep living."

author: melissa chappell

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