

**Dr Smith's**  
**Little Handbook of Health**



Dear Reader,

Beware! Do not under-estimate this little book. It may be small, but the ideas on its pages are extremely powerful. If you use it now, it could help you live to be a hundred years old (or even more!)

It does not contain the recipe for everlasting life or superhuman strength, and it is not a magic health potion, not quite. Instead it is a precious guide to help you live a big, long, happy and healthy life.

The truth is your parents and grandparents have created a world where staying healthy is surprisingly difficult. In fact, it is increasingly unusual. When they were growing up they ate lots of vegetables, walked to school and the internet had not been invented. Your life is likely to be very different and you are faced with daily challenges to your well-being.

This handbook is designed to help guide and protect you. It is not extreme, it will not tell you to throw away your phone or to be in bed by 7 o'clock, nor will it ban fast foods or recommend you attend boot camp. Instead it will gently nudge you to make small changes to your lifestyle, changes that will hopefully turn into the strong habits that set you up for a sparkling future.

Read on and start learning how to live long and well.

Dr Nick Smith

# Lifestyle Habits

Doctors have realised that many common illnesses can be influenced simply by the way you live your life; the habits you develop. In many cases, changing these lifestyle habits can be more effective than taking medicines.

In an effort to seek out the habits that keep us healthy, researchers have studied the five places in the world where people live the longest and have low levels of chronic disease. These sites are found in Japan, Italy, Greece, Costa Rica and California and are known as *Blue Zones*. The researchers were surprised to discover, that although these long-lived communities were many miles apart, they had many habits in common. Using this information we have chosen 10 habits that will help you to live a big, long, happy and healthy life.



Here they are:

## Healthy Planet

### 1. Creating a Healthy Planet

## Healthy Mind-Set

### 2. Living

*They had a reason for living, a sense of purpose.*

### 3. Chilling

*They took opportunities to relax and de-stress.*

## Healthy Relationships

### 4. Loving

*They put their family first.*

### 5. Belonging

*They belonged to a community.*

### 6. Choosing

*They chose to spend their time with other healthy people.*

## Healthy Body

### 7. Feeding

*They ate moderate portions of fresh, local, unprocessed food.*

### 8. Planting

*They mainly ate plant based foods and often grew their own vegetables.*

### 9. Moving

*The exercise they did was part of their normal day, like walking to work or gardening.*

### 10. Snoozing

*They got sufficient sleep, often taking daily naps.*

So if you were to adopt these habits, not only might you live longer but there is evidence that you could be happier as well.

In this book I will get you to look at your habits and suggest, where you have a choice, some simple ways you might improve them. It is more important for you to achieve a balance between each of these habits rather than putting all your energy into one or two. For example, it is not helpful for you to be an amazing sleeper who eats lots of unhealthy food, or fantastically fit but permanently stressed.

The changes I will suggest will be small, but I hope they will be lifelong. They are entirely voluntary.

# 10 Habits

to help you live a big, long,  
happy and healthy life



 **Healthy Mind-Set**

 **Healthy Relationships**

 **Healthy Body**

## Creating a Healthy Planet



Climate change is likely to be the defining issue of your generation. If you want to live a long, happy and healthy life then you need a healthy planet. However, the planet is warming up fast - faster than at any time in the Earth's history - and if this continues it has significant consequences for people and wildlife around the globe. Efforts are now focussed on keeping temperatures from increasing no more than 1.5 degrees, and you can play your part.

Global warming is caused through human activities like the burning of fossil fuels, farming, and deforestation, all of which generate an excess of greenhouse gasses like carbon dioxide. Nearly everything you do releases an amount of carbon into the atmosphere and this is known as your carbon footprint. By making the right choices you can reduce your footprint and help combat climate change.

There are many ways you can do this; for example use less energy, buy fewer goods, or eat less meat. If you all make small changes then together you can make a difference.

You might consider becoming the politicians, the scientists, the journalists and the policy makers of the future, and put yourself in a position to make a big difference.

## Living



The people who live in *Blue Zones* have a strong sense of purpose. They know why they wake up in the morning because they tend to have a goal in life, something they are working towards. It does not have to be anything earth shattering, it can be something as simple as seeing their grandchildren happy and successful, but by having this sense of purpose, they may lower their stress levels and reduce the chances of having arthritis or a stroke.

Consider what it is that you get up in the morning for? What is it you love doing? What do you have a passion or talent for? Is there a career or interest you would like to pursue? Alternatively, is there anything new that you would like to develop, such as learning a new instrument or language? Find your reason for getting up in the morning.



## Chilling



The modern world can generate a good deal of unwanted stress; there are never enough hours in the day, relationships can be very demanding and social media requires your constant attention. Our bodies are not designed for this continuous stress, so we can become ill. Learning to switch-off can be an antidote.

The *Blue Zone* communities have routines that shed stress. They set aside time in the day where they can escape the commotion of life by focussing on themselves - for example by taking a nap, praying, or spending time remembering their ancestors.

You could do the same by scheduling a time in the day that is just for you, when you stop everything and have some 'me' time, free from distractions.

You could use the time for anything, as long as it does not involve your phone or a computer. Try cooking, painting, meditation, singing, having a bath, playing an instrument, reading a book, dancing, yoga, gardening, colouring in... the list is endless. This relaxed time may help you feel less pressurised, lower your stress hormone levels and counter the long term effects of stress.

If you feel you don't have time for this, it is possible you need it the most!

## Loving



For *Blue Zone* communities, family is the number one priority, and they build their lives around this core. Elderly relatives live with their families (or nearby) and are involved in the lives of the younger generations. They eat meals together, celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and generally support each other. This has been shown to make them healthier, have lower stress levels, reduce accidents and maintain their mental and social skills.



Parents invest time and love in their children, who in time are more likely to care for them when they get older.

You could copy this behaviour by making the effort where possible to visit your elderly relatives, to take an interest in their lives, to help them with chores, or just pop in for a cup of tea and a chat. Embrace your family celebrations and try to participate as often as possible in family meals.

## Belonging



*Blue Zones* are typically religious communities. A number of studies have shown that being religious is associated with a lower risk of death which may be in part due to the strong support network these communities provide along with a more optimistic outlook on life.

If you are already part of a religious community then embrace it, involve yourself in its activities, help and support the other members.

If you are not part of a religious community then try embracing other types of groups you can belong to such as clubs and societies, your neighbourhood community, your Form, Year or House.



## Choosing



*Blue Zone* people hang out with *Blue Zone* people. Sometimes this is because they are in isolated communities but if they have a choice, they chose to surround themselves with people with *Blue Zone* values. This makes it so much easier to for them to continue their good habits. Studies show that smoking, obesity, happiness, and even loneliness are contagious, so having social networks of healthy people can actually help keep you healthy.

Go through your family and friends in your mind. Which ones seem to exhibit *Blue Zone* habits like healthy eating, making time to relax or can be relied on in a time of need? Make an effort to spend more of your time with these people.



## Feeding



A lot of the food available to us nowadays is highly processed and high in calories. Increasing people are eating more than they need and as a result become overweight. Many will try to reverse this by dieting, but unfortunately 95% of them will revert back to their previous eating habits.

The *Blue Zone* communities do not eat too much and they do not go on diets. They eat fresh, unprocessed, local produce, made mainly of plants.

Essentially, they avoid food that is old, has been messed about with or has travelled long distances. They do eat sugary treats, but only on special occasions like birthdays or Christmas. They like sitting down to eat their meals with their family and their last meal of the day is often the smallest and eaten quite early.

Try any or all of these to establish a good relationship with your food.

### *Eat less sugar.*

Sugar is highly addictive, the more you eat, the more you crave.

In the past when we were hunter gatherers, the desire to eat sugary foods helped us to store energy. Now we are constantly surrounded by sugary foods this craving can

make us consume too much, and lead to health issues like obesity and diabetes. Sugar is hiding everywhere and many foods contain more sugar than you would think, for example low-fat yogurt, ketchup and fruit juice. Getting to know how much sugar is in food is the first step in eating less, so it is well worth reading the nutritional information on food packaging. Over time, small steps can actually make a big difference, try not having sugar in your tea or eating two biscuits rather than four.

### *Narrow your feeding window.*

Try to limit the total window of time in the day during which you will eat. Make sure you have breakfast in the morning and then avoid snacking after your evening meal. This will help provide your body with the time needed for the repair and maintenance of your cells, as well as for burning up excess fat.

### *Avoid foods with lots of ingredients*

Much of the food we eat is processed to make it sweeter, to last longer and to look and taste more appealing. These highly refined foods are regarded by some experts as low quality food and may cause a number of inflammatory diseases. Try to favour foods that have

fewer ingredients in them, and closely resemble their original state. Chicken that looks like chicken and potato that looks like potato.

### *Drink lots of water*

Two thirds of our bodies are made of water so it is not surprising that if you become dehydrated, your body will not work as well. This may cause headaches, tiredness and dry skin. It is best to try to drink at least a litre of nice clear water a day. Drink it before meals, after meals or during the day, whenever you prefer. You can tell if you are hydrated because your urine will be light yellow to clear in colour!



## Planting



The *Blue Zone* communities eat a diet that is 95% plant based. Although they are not all strict vegetarians, they do not consume very much meat. Typically, they eat a small serving of meat (3-4oz) about five times per month.

Studies have shown that avoiding meat can reduce the risk of developing several diseases such as heart disease and cancer. It might therefore be beneficial to favour plant based foods such as:

- Vegetables
- Legumes (e.g. beans, peas, lentils & chickpeas)
- Whole grains
- Nuts

You could start reducing your meat intake by having one meat free day per week and replacing it with one of the food groups above.

Vegetables have particular health benefits as they are rich in fibre, vitamins and minerals and they help keep the gut healthy. It is thought that eating a wide range of different coloured vegetables encourages a variety of gut bacteria to flourish and these play a major part in protecting us against disease.

See if you can eat more vegetables, more often. There is a whole range of coloured vegetables: green, red, orange, yellow, blue, purple and beige. See how many different colours you can eat in a week.

Many *Blue Zone* communities grow their own vegetables. This is a winning formula because you not only does it provide fresh, unprocessed local vegetables, but it also provides the opportunity for movement and relaxation.

Growing your own vegetables is a really uplifting activity; why not start by growing some tomatoes, peas or potatoes? You do not need a large garden, just some seeds and some pots or a compost bag.



## Moving



Whilst it is common knowledge that exercise has a whole range of health benefits we now move around much less than we did in the past.

We use cars for the shortest of journeys, many jobs are sedentary and our most popular forms of entertainment involve sitting down in front of a screen. In addition, we have cleverly invented a range of machines to reduce the need for manual effort, like leaf blowers so we don't have to sweep or food processors so we don't have to stir. It certainly makes life easier, but it means we have massively reduced our daily physical effort compared with our grandparents. It is not unusual for many people to go all week without breaking into a sweat from physical activity.

To counter this, many people schedule in sessions of intense exercise like a gym workout or a run. Once done, they feel that their quota of physical exercise is complete and go back to sedentary ways for the rest of the week. The problem is that, just like diets, it is hard to keep these sessions going and often they are not frequent or prolonged enough for the weight loss people hope for. On the other hand, overdoing it can cause injury or exhaustion which results in no physical activity at all!

*Blue Zone* people do not go to the gym or run marathons,

their exercise comes from the movement involved in their daily lives. They will walk to most places and they use the stairs. They will do household chores by hand and they will dig, hoe, weed and harvest their gardens. Many of them have jobs that require physical effort like farming or labouring. They do not sit down for very long.

If you are not currently involved in regular exercise you could follow their lead by walking to school (if possible), to the shops or to your friends and by always using the stairs instead of the lifts or escalator. Get involved in clubs and activities like gardening that require movement. Use dead time during the day, like when you are waiting for a kettle to boil or a microwave to finish, to do some simple strength exercises using your body as a weight (squats, press-ups, triceps dips etc.)



## Snoozing



We are designed to spend about a third of our lives asleep because it enables our bodies to rest, recover, repair and grow.

However, in today's 24 hour world, many of us are not getting enough sleep and it has been estimated that we get between one and two hours less sleep a night than our grandparents. Over a 70 year life this is equal to about about 51,000 hours less sleep.

No wonder then, that many of us experience symptoms of being sleep deprived; tiredness, irritability, lack of concentration. Over time you can build up a sleep debt that will not be repaid with just an extra hour here or there.

It is difficult to say how much sleep each of us needs (probably between 8 and 10 hours for teenagers) but if you wake up feeling refreshed, wake up at roughly the same time without an alarm and fall asleep within 30 minutes of going to bed, you are probably getting enough.

It will not surprise you to discover that people in *Blue Zones* get sufficient sleep at night. They also often take daytime naps of up to 30 minutes.

There are plenty of things you can do to improve your sleep. Start by creating a sleep-friendly bedroom that

blocks out as much light and sound as possible, from heavy blackout curtains to covering up small led lights.

Phones, tablets and computer screens give out the same light as the morning sun and trick your brain into thinking it is time to get up. You can get devices or software that reduce these emissions but not using them in the period leading up to bed is the most effective solution.

Establish a relaxing bedtime routine by perhaps have a bath, listening to music, turning off your electronic devices and avoiding as far as possible activities that will make you tense, like an emotive film or video game. As far as possible try to go to bed and get up at the same time as this helps your body establish its rhythm.



# Getting the habit habit

So, eager to get going? Keen to establish ten new habits immediately? Ready, steady.....slow down.

It is not a race, the key is to go easy, much more like the tortoise than the hare. Diet and fitness regimes often fail because they involve too much, too soon so aim for small changes that you can sustain over a long period of time, a lifetime.

Research shows that it can take between 5-12 weeks to develop a habit so start by picking the **one habit** that you think you will find the easiest and try to develop it over the next term. Commit to this habit by choosing **up to 3** of the actions suggested on the following pages.

It would be great to team up with a friend or family member as doing this together increases the likelihood of success.

If you slip up, don't quit, just brush yourself down and keep going, avoid catastrophic thinking where if you slip up once you decide you might as well give up on that habit, and worse still give up on all of them. As you become successful with your initial habits gradually introduce some others.

Some activities will involve more than one habit - for example joining a cycling club with a friend bags you Living, Chilling, Belonging, Choosing and Moving.

























# Achievements

Write down something that you are proud of each month. -

e.g. Being picked for netball team, your maths homework, helping a friend, speaking in assembly, gaining merits, starting to learn the guitar, doing a fun run, helping your parents out, etc.

September	
October	
November	
December	
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	
July	
August	

# Gratitude

List here someone you are grateful to -

e.g. A friend who helped you through an issue, a teacher who helped you with some work, a parent who put themselves out for you, etc.

Who you are grateful to and why

How you will thank them e.g. verbally (either face to face or by phone), by email or text, or even write a short thank you card

Autumn Term		
Spring Term		
Summer Term		