

# LIVE LONG & PROSPER

What have we learned about health over the past quarter century? A lot. Here's what you need to know

**A**geing well isn't just about making it to a certain birthday; it's also about living those years in good health – thriving, not surviving. In recent years, there's been a lot of attention on what's referred to as the Blue Zones – five regions of the world with some of the healthiest people, who consistently live to more than 100 years old. The secrets of their good health vary; for the centenarians in Okinawa, Japan, for example, high intakes of purple sweet potatoes and fermented soya products have been linked with better cardiovascular health. Meanwhile in Nicoya, Costa Rica, water that is naturally rich in calcium and magnesium may play a part. But there are some patterns – such as eating less meat – that certainly recur across all five locations. »

WORDS ANITA BEAN

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## DIETS DOWN THE YEARS



**1950s THE CABBAGE SOUP DIET** basically consisted of water and cabbage. Is it any surprise people lost weight? They missed out on protein, vitamins, minerals... and, well, flavour.

**1990s THE ATKINS DIET** was the original low-carb diet. Drawbacks included constipation and difficulty sustaining the diet in the long term.



**2000s 'CLEAN EATING'** was all the rage, though the definition was sketchy – unprocessed wholefoods were at the core, but many followers also cut out gluten, dairy and even cooked food.

**2010s THE PALEO DIET** promoted eating like our hunter-gatherer ancestors. It focused on lean meat, veg, fruits, nuts and seeds rather than any complex carbs.



**2020s THE KETO DIET** is a very high-fat, low-carb diet that restricts high-fibre foods, so it's hard to get your 5 a day.

When we look back over the past 25 years, and the various health trends and advice that have been covered over that time, common themes become clear, too.

“Waitrose’s underlying approach has always been one of balance and common sense rather than following the latest fads,” says Joanne Lunn, Partner & nutritionist. “Everything in moderation is key, even though science now gives us so much insight. Perhaps this has always been the bedrock of a long and healthy life.”

While nobody has yet discovered an exact recipe for good health, there are some golden ‘rules’ that stack up scientific evidence in their corner, time and time again – whatever part of the world you’re living in.

## GO WHOLEGRAIN

The low-carb craze of the 90s often demonised carbohydrates, leading to a fear of even healthy, nutrient-dense sources such as fruits and wholegrains. Today, scientists realise that not all carbs are created equal. Instead of avoidance, the emphasis is now on choosing complex, fibre-rich carbs such as wholegrains, legumes, fruits and vegetables. From barley and buckwheat to millet and farro, wholegrains are no longer the boring browns; they’re the vibrant, nutritious superheroes of your plate. Take it from the Sardinians – the island is home to the world’s longest-lived men, who eat plenty of wholegrain bread and beans (plus enjoy a little wine...).

## EMBRACE GOOD FATS

Low fat was once all the rage. Fat was positioned as enemy number one, with healthy foods such as nuts shunned in favour of low-fat snacks and desserts. Fast forward to today and science has shown that many ‘low-fat’ alternatives are actually loaded with sugar – not to mention the numerous studies that demonstrate how a Mediterranean-style diet, rich in healthy fats such as those found in olive oil, nuts and oily fish, boosts heart and bone health. Avocado, anyone?



## MAKE FRIENDS WITH FIBRE

Fibre-rich foods (wholegrains, fruit, vegetables, nuts and legumes) are a key feature of Blue-Zone diets. Older people who eat fibre-rich diets are also 80% more likely to live longer and stay healthier than those who don’t, according to a study in *The Journals of Gerontology*. It’s not just about keeping things moving either; fibre aids weight management, heart health and even blood-sugar control. Plus, it feeds our gut microbiome, which affects many aspects of health including the immune system and metabolic health.

## EAT MORE PLANTS

Whether it’s for ethical, environmental, or health reasons, more of us are including plant-based foods in our meals. Meat consumption fell 17% from 2008 to 2019, at the same time as sales of vegetarian food increased significantly. The number of vegans has increased 370% in the past »



five years. Overall, wholefoods that are naturally plant-based – fruit, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds – are considered the most beneficial for health, rather than vegan products that have undergone a high level of processing. This is the classic approach of the Mediterranean diet and other healthy cultures too, including all the Blue Zones areas (for example, the Seventh-day Adventists of Loma Linda, a Californian community where people outlive the average American by a decade, are mostly vegetarian).

## THINK ABOUT TIMING

Intermittent fasting – where you don't eat for an extended period of time, consolidating all your

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meals within a regular, specified eating window – is one of the hottest current health trends. Maybe you've tried the 5:2 diet (in which you eat normally for five days out of the week but restrict yourself to fewer calories the other two days) or the 16:8 (where you consume all of your daily calories within an eight-hour timeframe). But fasting isn't new. Before the development of agriculture, our hunter-gatherer ancestors would have gone significant periods without food – simply because it wasn't always available. It's too early to say whether it can help us live longer, but studies suggest that there are a number of health benefits to intermittent fasting, including weight loss, improved gut and heart health, and better blood-sugar control.

## THE FUTURE OF HEALTH

*Waitrose Partner & nutritionist Joanne Lunn shares three predictions for what's next on the health agenda.*

### PERSONALISATION

The advent of nutrition apps, such as Zoe, and wearable devices that track your body's response to food will allow people to monitor their diets more easily. People respond differently to different foods, so we expect to see companies offering



customisable products and individual nutrition plans.

### NOT JUST NUTRITION

There's increasing interest in foods that offer specific health benefits beyond basic nutrition – foods that improve your mood, for example. Probiotics,

prebiotics and foods rich in antioxidants are all set to become more popular as people recognise the link between diet and overall wellbeing.

### PLANT-BASED INNOVATIONS

Sustainable ingredients and plant-based options

will continue to grow in popularity as people consider how their food choices affect themselves and the planet. In the near future, expect to see more meat substitutes, insect protein and even lab-grown meat as scientists find new ways to tackle global warming.