

The COVID-Zone an Antidote to Blue Zones?

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Psychologically and Physically Speaking **By Dr. Nussbaum**

Daniel Buettner introduced *Blue Zones* in a November 2005 *National Geographic Magazine* cover story entitled, *Secrets of a Long Life*. Super longevity has been discovered in different regions of the world which carry the distinction of being named as “blue zones.”

Within these blue zones, observations and research indicates a common pattern of living that correlates with longevity. This includes a physically active life, ongoing social engagement, healthy dieting, reduced stress, moderate alcohol intake, role and purpose, exposure to sunlight and outdoors and family interaction.

I wonder about the many studies I have read on the importance of successful aging in my own career and how all of these studies and reports consistently underscore the importance of socialization, physical activity, spirituality, nutrition, and mental stimulation. The critical ingredient of role, life purpose, and family are also quite typical to those living long and quality-filled lives.

How does all this fit with our behavior and lives today? I suggest our current policy in response to COVID-19 is an antidote to the Blue Zone; indeed, we have instituted the exact environment designed for psychological distress, illness, and chronic stress. Psychologically and physically, we need to get back to living as if we are in a blue zone.

Economics and Health

By Robb McKinney

This pandemic has adversely affected us economically far beyond the obvious stock market impact. Economic stability and financial security are indicators of better physical health however during COVID-19, 40 million Americans filed for unemployment. This comes when pre-crisis estimates already found 31 percent of American households living “paycheck to paycheck.” The United Nations anticipates an increase in worldwide poverty and inequalities as a result of the pandemic.

Economic distresses leave people susceptible to higher rates of disease, victimization, alcohol/drug abuse and suicide—which increase as income decreases.

In a June 1 article, *Fortune Magazine* echoes Dr. Nussbaum’s observation from our first two COVID-19 podcasts likening COVID-19 to a war “unlike other wars in that the enemy is invisible and inhuman”. Government response, uncertainty, potential for winners and losers and a changed role of government will similarly affect the ultimate outcome as has been the case with traditional wars in the past.

Economic instability, decreased financial health and uncertainty collide to foster the anti-blue zone. These combine with the stress and isolation of the current situation to broaden this anti-health setting.

In conclusion

As we come out of this state of affairs, we need to focus on what we *can* control: eating right, staying physically active, regular sleep, exposure to sunshine, prayer and staying emotionally/relationally connected while fostering a hope for the future. Focusing on these controllable lifestyle choices can keep our immune systems activated and allow our outlook a more positive environment in which to grow.

Lifestyle For Health Versus Chronic Stress

Chronic Stress Environment	Brain and Body Health
Sedentary	Physically Active
Social Isolation-alone	Social Integration-belong
High Sugar-Bad Fats-Processed Foods	Plant Based-Mediterranean
Caloric Excess-3 meals and snacks	Caloric Restriction-Include Fasting
Psychosocial Stress	Sense of Control-Adaptive
Passive and Rote	Novel and Complex
Lack of Sunshine-Limited Outdoors	Sunshine and Daylight
Sleep Disruption	Sleep Regulation
Economic Vulnerability	Economic Stability
Financial pain and ruin	Financial health
No Relationship to Prayer or God	Relationship to God and Prayer
Loneliness	Emotionally Connected
Failure to Thrive	Hope and Zest for Life