

Hara Hachi Bu: The Okinawan's Secret to Longevity

Experts Attribute Longevity to the Traditional Okinawan Diet

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Hara hachi bu (also commonly referred to as *hara hachi bun me*) is a Confucian teaching that advises people to eat only until they are approximately 80 percent full. It is a cultural practice that can still be found today among communities of Okinawans who live on the island of the southernmost prefecture (formerly province) of Japan. The people of Okinawa first became of interest in Western medical science due to their remarkable number of centenarians, which is reportedly the highest in the world proportionate to the population.

Hara hachi bu is one of many dietary and lifestyle customs that medical professionals attribute to the Okinawans' famously long and healthy lives.

The Practice of Hara Hachi Bu

The Japanese phrase, *hara hachi bun me*, roughly translates into English as "belly 80 percent full" or "eat until you are 8 parts full," referencing the fraction eight out of ten. In essence, the practice of *hara hachi bu* is an inexact method of calorie restriction. While higher caloric intake and overeating is common in many Western cultures, the Okinawans have a custom of self-imposed calorie restriction following the practice of *hara hachi bu*. In fact, Okinawans are known to regularly consume approximately 1,800 to 1,900 calories a day, which is a few hundred calories less than what is prescribed for the average healthy American. This lower calorie intake not only leads to their consistently (and sometimes significantly) lower Body Mass Index (BMI) scores, but it is likely a major contributor to their remarkable health and long life spans.

Hara Hachi Bu and the Okinawan Diet

In the last several decades, Okinawans and their unique lifestyle has become of greater interest in the West. Unlike other long-living communities, like the Abkhazians who have claimed remarkable lifespans, the ages of Okinawans can be verified as the family registry system known as *Koseki* has been in place for all citizens in Japan for over 130 years.

It is believed that the Okinawans live longer and healthier lives than any other people on earth.

When it comes to their remarkable longevity, what and how the Okinawans eat is just as important as the number of calories. Though studies have confirmed the Okinawans' reduced caloric intake, the Okinawans are not your classic calorie-counters. By following the principles of the *hara hachi bu* teaching, Okinawans eat smaller portions and eat more slowly than their overeating counterparts. Being in tune with their bodies also allows them to know when to stop while most other cultures do not even allow time for the satiety or "I'm full" signal to get from the stomach to the brain (which can take up to 20 minutes) before they continue eating.

Okinawans are also known for what they eat. Their diet is high in fresh fruits and vegetables and also includes a healthy amount of whole grains, legumes, and fish. Their traditional diet is naturally high in essential nutrients and essentially free from processed foods.

It is believed that as a result, Okinawans have practically avoided the chronic diseases commonly associated with aging like Alzheimer's, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

Source

Willcox, Bradley J., D. Craig Willcox, and Makoto Suzuki. *The Okinawa Program: How the World's Longest-lived People Achieve Everlasting Health--and How You Can Too.* New York: Clarkson Potter, 2001.