

Our life spans are divided into two parts; the health span and the disability span. The health span is the period of our lives where we are functional and without any chronic health problems.

The Disability Span is characterized by chronic symptoms and/or management of chronic conditions. People in this phase frequent their health care providers, not for preventive purposes, but for treatment. They are often less able to engage in activities that they once enjoyed.

The citizens of United States have the longest disability span of any other country, averaging eleven years. Citizens of Taiwan and Okinawa have the shortest averaging 3 weeks. In other words, Taiwanese and Okinawans live fully functional lives until their deaths. Americans spend many years suffering with various chronic conditions prior to death.

I don't know about you, but I would prefer to live like the Taiwanese. To do that, however, it requires an understanding of why they have such healthy lives. Diet isn't the only reason. While these individuals don't exercise as we think of exercise, they live very physically active lives. They walk or ride bicycles more than they ride in cars. They do not have as many conveniences as we do, so they perform more manual work around the house. They don't sit and watch television like we do as well. Their occupations are often more physical in nature. So while they aren't usually members of fitness clubs, they exercise their bodies as part of their daily lives.

Nutrition is a significant factor as well. The citizens of these regions eat few processed foods. They eat a much larger quantity of vegetables and the Okinawans eat a lot of fish.

Crops are more organically grown as they have less access to commercial pesticides and fertilizers. Their livestock are also raised without hormones and antibiotics. Burgers and fries are rarely, if ever, part of their diet. Milk is also rarely consumed. The primary grain consumed is rice which is much less likely to cause inflammation in the body than corn and wheat which are the most common grains consumed by Americans.

There is a drastic difference in health care between us and them. They take few, if any, drugs. They tend to allow their bodies to recover from illness, rather than seek treatment. When they do seek treatment, it is more likely to be conservative in nature and often non-pharmaceutical.

We would have a great deal of challenges to overcome in order to live more like the Taiwanese and Okinawans. Next week I will discuss some steps that we could take.