



WHY YOUR ZIP CODE CAN IMPACT YOUR HEALTH

While both your genetics and your environment play a role in your overall health, new studies have found that your ZIP code has a huge influence on your wellbeing. For example, if Person A lives in an area with little to no pollution, clean water, has access to fresh food from local farms, and has a low-stress lifestyle with plenty of exercise – and Person B lives in a polluted city in an impoverished area, eats lots of fast food, has high stress, and rarely exercises – Person A will most likely be much healthier based on their ZIP code.

One study, [published in the journal *Nature Genetics*](#), found that for diseases and conditions that can develop by early adulthood, genes account for about 40% of variations from one person to

another. Environment (i.e., climate, pollution, socioeconomic status, diet and lifestyle) accounts for most of the remaining 60%.

Genetics had the largest influence on early-in-life eye diseases and cognitive disorders. But environment was the clearest factor in morbid obesity and infections, such as Lyme disease. It was also the biggest factor in lead poisoning.

Many studies have shown that a person's postal code has a strong effect on their total wellbeing. One 2013 study by the University of Washington found those living in San Francisco or wealthy Washington, D.C. suburbs were much healthier than those living in Appalachia or rural Mississippi.

Similar studies have supported these findings. Many have found that different states have greatly different rates of heart disease, stroke, cancer and other diseases. These studies uphold what scientists and doctors have repeatedly stated: health is often a combination of genes and environment. People with certain genetic predispositions are more likely, for example, to become obese if they live in a place where it's hard to exercise and difficult to eat a healthy diet.

“Your ZIP Code Might Determine How Long You Live – and the Difference Could be Decades,” Jamie Ducharme, Time.com, Aug. 8, 2021.

“ZIP Code or Genetic Code?” Ekaterina Pesheva, Harvard.edu, Jan. 14, 20219.

“Which Affects Health More – DNA or ZIP Code?” Maggie Fox, nbcnews.com, Jan. 14, 2019.

FOUR QUICK STEPS FOR EATING LESS

Sugar



1 Knowing how much sugar we really consume helps us adhere to the ages-old idea of “everything in moderation.” Aim to stay within the American Heart Association’s daily limit recommendation, which is **25 grams (6 teaspoons) for women and 36 grams (9 teaspoons) for men.** To put those numbers in perspective, one regular can of soda contains roughly **35 grams** of added sugar.

2 This is where reading food labels comes in handy. So much of the sugar we consume is hidden in processed foods that aren’t even considered sweets, like yogurt, cereal, pasta sauce or salad dressings. There are more than **50** different names for sugar and **74%** of packaged foods have added sugar! As of January, the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) issued new regulations to the Nutrition Facts labels on packaged food. Labels must now show the percentage from added sugar. Less than **10%** of your daily calories should come from added sugar.

3 Drinking more water is perhaps the quickest, most effective way for reducing our sugar intake. Sweetened beverages are the leading sources of added sugar in the American diet. Ordering a vanilla-flavored latte adds up to 20 grams of sugar to your cup. If you’re not a big fan of plain water, try infusing it. Place fruits, veggies, herbs and/or spices in a pitcher with water and pop it in the fridge. For the most flavorful infusion, let your creation steep overnight. You can also use naturally sparkling mineral water for a new twist.

4 Finally, redesigning recipes without much effort can help us chisel away at our daily sugar intake. Try new takes on dessert. For “nice cream,” freeze a ripe banana overnight; blend it with a splash of milk of your choice and enjoy right away. It might not be identical to traditional ice cream, but it’s certainly sweet and beats the overload of calories from the original dessert! Or something as simple as adding a dollop of whipped cream atop a bowl of strawberries can make a healthy treat decadent. Plus, two tablespoons of Reddi-Wip contains less than 1 gram of added sugar.

“How to Eat Less Sugar,” Sally Wadyka, consumerreports.org, July 18, 2021.

“The FDA Is Giving the Nutrition Facts Label a Makeover,” Jessica Malen, motivatehealth.com, March 9, 2020.

No-Bake Tahini Date Energy Bites

1½ cups pitted Medjool dates
(about 12 to 14)

⅓ cup raw cashews

¼ teaspoon salt

⅛ teaspoon ground cardamom

3 tablespoons tahini

Options for coating: shredded
unsweetened coconut or toasted
sesame seeds

1. Place the dates, cashews, salt and cardamom in a food processor and blend until the mix is well combined (about one minute).
2. Add the tahini and blend for 20 seconds or until it is mixed thoroughly.
3. Roll approximately one tablespoon of the mix in your hands to form evenly sized balls or bites.
4. Place the shredded coconut or sesame seeds on a plate and roll the balls to coat them in your topping of choice.
5. Refrigerate your energy bites on a large plate lined with parchment paper for at least one hour before enjoying.

SERVINGS 12 balls

ACTIVE TIME 30 minutes **TOTAL TIME** 30 minutes

Recipe adapted from thekitchn.com

