

A free guide from Dr. Zeina Moukarzel, MD



10 Lebanese Longevity Habits

Live to 100, The Lebanese Way - Backed by Science

عيش المية بصحة... بالطريقة اللبنانية

I spent years in the ICU meeting the final chapter of preventable disease. Meanwhile, in our mountains, Lebanese men and women in their 90s and 100s were still climbing stairs, cooking, and laughing around a Sunday table.

They were never my patients. This guide explains why - with the habits of our grandparents, validated by modern lifestyle medicine.

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HABIT 1 - NUTRITION

Eat Like Your Teta Cooked

طبخ تيتا... أول وصفة طبية

THE LEBANESE WAY

Mujaddara, tabbouleh, foul, hummus, wild greens like hindbeh - the traditional Lebanese table is a masterclass in whole-food, plant-forward eating: legumes, whole grains, vegetables, herbs, and olive oil.

THE SCIENCE

The landmark PREDIMED trial (NEJM) showed a Mediterranean-style diet reduced major cardiovascular events by about 30%. Large cohort studies link daily legume intake with longer life - and legumes are the most consistent food across all five Blue Zones.

Rx: Put legumes on your plate once a day. Mujaddara counts. So does a bowl of foul.

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HABIT 2 - NUTRITION

Make Olive Oil Your Default Fat

زيت الزيتون ذهب لبنان

THE LEBANESE WAY

Our grandparents did not measure olive oil - they poured it on everything, from labneh to salad to cooked greens. Real, extra-virgin Lebanese olive oil, not refined seed-oil blends.

THE SCIENCE

In PREDIMED, the group consuming extra-virgin olive oil (about 4 tablespoons daily) saw the strongest reduction in heart attacks and strokes. Its polyphenols reduce inflammation and protect blood vessels.

Rx: Replace butter, margarine, and generic 'vegetable oil' with extra-virgin olive oil - about 3 to 4 tablespoons daily as part of meals.

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HABIT 3 - MOVEMENT

Walk After You Eat

تغدى وتمدى، تعشى وتمشى

THE LEBANESE WAY

The old ritual of the evening walk through the village - the mashieh - was never called exercise. It was simply life. Centenarians in every Blue Zone move naturally all day long.

THE SCIENCE

Short walks after meals blunt the blood-sugar spike: even 10 minutes of light walking measurably improves post-meal glucose. Cohort studies show mortality risk drops steeply up to about 7,000-8,000 steps per day.

Rx: Ten minutes of walking after your biggest meal of the day. No gym required.

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HABIT 4 - NUTRITION

Eat Mezze-Style and Stop at 80%

المأزّة حكمة عالطاولة

THE LEBANESE WAY

Mezze is accidental genius: small shared plates, eaten slowly, with conversation between bites. Compare that with a single giant plate finished in ten minutes.

THE SCIENCE

Okinawans call it hara hachi bu - stop eating when you are 80% full. Slower, social eating gives your satiety hormones the 20 minutes they need to signal 'enough,' which naturally moderates calories without dieting.

Rx: Serve meals in small plates, share them, and put the fork down between bites. Leave the table satisfied, not stuffed.

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HABIT 5 - CONNECTION

Keep Sunday Lunch Sacred

غدا الأحد دوا القلب

THE LEBANESE WAY

The multigenerational Sunday table is Lebanon's most under-rated medical intervention. Loneliness, not just cholesterol, shortens lives.

THE SCIENCE

The Holt-Lunstad meta-analysis of over 300,000 people found that weak social connection predicts early death as strongly as smoking about 15 cigarettes a day - and more strongly than obesity or inactivity.

Rx: Protect one weekly family or friends meal as non-negotiable. Phones off the table.

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HABIT 6 - SLEEP

Treat Sleep Like a Prescription

النوم سلطان

THE LEBANESE WAY

Before generators hummed all night and screens glowed at midnight, Lebanese villages slept with the dark and rose with the light.

THE SCIENCE

Meta-analyses link chronic short sleep (under 6 hours) with higher rates of hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and earlier death. Sleep is when blood pressure dips and the brain clears metabolic waste.

Rx: Aim for 7 to 8 hours. Fixed wake time, dark cool room, no screens in the last 30 minutes, and keep the phone out of the bedroom.

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HABIT 7 - STRESS

Reclaim the Sobhiyye

الصبحية مش عادة... دوا

THE LEBANESE WAY

The morning coffee on the balcony, the unhurried visit with a neighbor, the afternoon pause - our culture built daily 'downshift' rituals long before science named them.

THE SCIENCE

Chronic stress keeps cortisol and blood pressure elevated and drives inflammation. Trials of brief daily relaxation practices - breathing exercises, mindfulness, even quiet coffee rituals without screens - show meaningful reductions in blood pressure and anxiety.

Rx: One daily 10-minute pause that is yours alone - coffee without a phone, a prayer, five slow breaths on the balcony.

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HABIT 8 - MOVEMENT

Lift Something After 50

القوة ما إلها عمر

THE LEBANESE WAY

Kneading dough, carrying jars of olive oil, working the terraces - traditional life loaded our muscles daily. Modern life removed the load, and our muscles are quietly disappearing.

THE SCIENCE

After 50 we lose muscle every year (sarcopenia), and low muscle strength independently predicts falls, frailty, and mortality. Resistance training twice a week preserves muscle, bone, glucose control, and independence.

Rx: Two short strength sessions weekly - squats to a chair, wall push-ups, carrying groceries counts. Start where you are.

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HABIT 9 - SUBSTANCES

No Smoke Is Safe - Including Arguileh

ما في دخان صحي

THE LEBANESE WAY

This is the one habit where tradition is wrong. The idea that arguileh is 'filtered by water' and therefore safer is a myth I have watched end lives in the ICU.

THE SCIENCE

The WHO estimates a single one-hour arguileh session can involve inhaling smoke volumes many times greater than one cigarette. Waterpipe smoking is linked to heart disease, lung disease, and cancers - the water filters almost nothing that matters.

Rx: There is no safe dose of smoke. If you smoke anything, quitting is the single most powerful longevity decision you can make - and help exists.

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HABIT 10 - PURPOSE

Know Your 'Why' at Every Age

يللي عندو ليش، بيعيش

THE LEBANESE WAY

In our villages, no one 'retires' from life - the 90-year-old still tends her vines, hosts her grandchildren, holds her role. Purpose does not have a retirement age.

THE SCIENCE

In the Rush Memory and Aging Project, older adults with a strong sense of purpose had substantially lower mortality and slower cognitive decline. Purpose predicts survival independently of age, income, and health status.

Rx: Write one sentence: 'I wake up for ____.' If the line is blank, make finding it your next health project - a role, a craft, a person, a garden.

Start With One

Longevity is not built in a week of perfection - it is built in decades of small, repeated choices. Do not attempt all ten habits at once. Pick the one that feels easiest, practice it for two weeks until it feels like yours, then add the next. That is exactly how our grandparents did it: one meal, one walk, one Sunday at a time.

My starting habit: _____

When I will do it: _____

Who I will tell: _____

Selected Scientific References

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