



What Japan Puts on the Plate

Scientists are learning that the secret to Japan's long, happy lives may begin with a simple bowl of rice and fish.

Japan is famous for many things, such as beautiful temples, fast trains, and very long lives. For years, scientists have studied why Japanese people often live longer than people in other countries. The answer is not just good medicine. A big part of the answer sits on the dinner plate.

A traditional Japanese [diet](#)¹ is simple and fresh. It usually includes rice, vegetables, soybeans, green tea, and a lot of fish. People in Japan eat much less red meat and fewer sweet foods than people in Western countries. Now, a growing number of studies suggest that this way of eating does more than protect the body. It may also protect the mind.

For a long time, doctors believed that food and mood were not connected. Today, that idea has changed. Scientists have discovered a strong link between the stomach and the brain. The food we eat can affect how we think and feel every day.

The Japanese diet is rich in [seafood](#)², which contains special fats called omega-3. These fats are very important for a healthy brain. Some research has shown that people who eat more fish often [suffer](#)³ less from sadness and worry. Vegetables and soybeans also give the brain useful vitamins. Green tea, which Japanese people drink every day, can help a person feel calm and relaxed.

In one large study, researchers looked at the eating habits of thousands of Japanese workers. They found that people who followed the traditional diet reported better [mental](#)⁴ health

than those who ate more Western fast food. The difference was clear.

However, scientists believe the secret is not only about the food itself. The Japanese way of eating also includes important social habits. In many homes, families still cook and share meals together. This time around the table builds a strong [relationship](#)⁵ between family members. People feel less lonely, and this also helps the mind.

There is another helpful idea called "hara hachi bu." It means that you should stop eating when you are about eighty percent full. People do not eat until they feel heavy and tired. This simple habit keeps the body in good [balance](#)⁶ and gives people more energy through the day.

Of course, life in modern Japan is changing fast. In big cities, many young people are now eating more burgers, pizza, and processed snacks. Some doctors worry that these new habits could harm both their bodies and their minds in the future.

Still, the lesson from the traditional Japanese kitchen is useful for everyone. You do not need to move to Tokyo or eat only Japanese food. You can start with small steps. Try to eat more fish and vegetables, drink more water or tea, and enjoy meals slowly with the people you love.

What we put on our plates matters. The traditional Japanese diet shows us that good food can feed the body and the mind at the same time. A healthy meal might be one of the simplest ways to build a happier life.

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Shadowing Mode

Perfect your pronunciation with synchronized audio and word-by-word highlighting.

VOCABULARY — KEY WORDS FROM THE STORY

#	WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1	diet <i>noun</i>	the kind of food that a person or group usually eats.	"The doctor told him that a healthy diet should include more fruit and vegetables."
2	seafood <i>noun</i>	fish and other animals from the sea that people eat.	"The restaurant by the beach is famous for its fresh seafood."
3	suffer <i>verb</i>	to feel pain, sadness, or another bad experience.	"Many people suffer from stress when they have too much work."
4	mental <i>adjective</i>	connected with the mind or with thinking and feelings.	"Getting enough sleep is very good for your mental health."
5	relationship <i>noun</i>	the way that two or more people feel about and behave towards each other.	"She has a close relationship with her sister and they talk every day."
6	balance <i>noun</i>	a good or healthy situation in which different things are kept at the right level.	"It is important to find a balance between work and rest."

COMPREHENSION — ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

According to the article, what is the main reason Japanese people often live longer?

- A-) Only their advanced medicine
- B-) A large part comes from what they eat
- C-) The temples and trains in Japan
- D-) Eating a lot of red meat and sweet foods

QUESTION 2 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

Why are the omega-3 fats in seafood important, according to the text?

- A-) They make food taste sweeter
- B-) They are very important for a healthy brain
- C-) They help people eat more red meat
- D-) They make green tea more relaxing

QUESTION 3 — SHORT ANSWER

The article says the Japanese diet is good for the mind for reasons that are 'not only about the food itself.' In your own words, explain what these other reasons are.

COMPREHENSION ANSWERS

My score today ___ / 3

Q1 A large part comes from what they eat ✓ Correct (B)

The text says 'The answer is not just good medicine. A big part of the answer sits on the dinner plate.' This clearly tells us that food, not only medicine, is a major reason for their long lives.

Q2 They are very important for a healthy brain ✓ Correct (B)

The article states that seafood 'contains special fats called omega-3' and that 'These fats are very important for a healthy brain.' This directly links the fats to brain health.

Q3 **Answer:** Besides the food, the article points to important social and behavioural habits. Families often cook and share meals together, which builds a strong relationship between them and makes people feel less lonely. There is also the habit of 'hara hachi bu', stopping eating at about eighty percent full, which keeps the body in good balance and gives people more energy. So the benefits come from how people eat and who they eat with, not just from what is on the plate.

Explanation: A strong answer should mention at least two non-food factors: (1) sharing meals with family and the social relationship or reduced loneliness this creates, and (2) the 'hara hachi bu' habit of not overeating. The best answers use the student's own words and connect these habits to mental wellbeing, not just physical health.

VOCABULARY — TRANSLATION & NOTES

diet

Common phrases: 'a healthy/balanced diet' and 'go on a diet' (to eat less to lose weight). Do not confuse these two meanings.

seafood

This is an uncountable noun, so we say 'some seafood', not 'a seafood' or 'seafoods'.

suffer

Often used with 'from': 'suffer from a cold', 'suffer from depression'. Remember the double 'f'.

mental

Very common in the phrase 'mental health'. The opposite area is 'physical' (about the body).

relationship

Use 'a relationship with' a person and 'a relationship between' two people. Note the spelling: relation + ship.

balance

Common phrases: 'a good balance', 'keep your balance', and 'work-life balance'. It can also be a verb (to balance).

YOUR TURN — SENTENCE BUILDING

Mastery comes from practice. Write original sentences using today's target vocabulary.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

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