Ikigai: What the Research Says

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How the journal makes ikigai work

Ikigai (生き甲斐) means "a reason for being": the sense that life is worth living. Research links it to longer, healthier lives, and the journal is designed to help people find it, strengthen it and keep it for decades.

- **Purpose you write down.** Regular prompts help people name what gives their life meaning, turning a vague feeling into a clear, personal ikigai.
- **Purpose put into action.** Each reflection connects ikigai to daily choices, relationships and contribution to others.
- **Built for a lifetime.** Following the journal's long horizon of seven years to rebuild, ten years to master and a lifetime to maintain, ikigai is revisited and renewed as life changes.
- **Purpose at every age.** The strongest research comes from adults in midlife and beyond, the years the journal is built to support.

Bottom line

A strong sense of purpose is consistently linked to a longer, healthier life. A meta-analysis of more than 136,000 people found a high sense of purpose was linked to about 17% lower risk of death and of heart attack or stroke. Purpose and ikigai have also been linked to lower risk of Alzheimer's disease, dementia and disability, and to greater happiness. These studies are observational, so they show a strong link rather than proof of cause, but the pattern holds across countries, ages and decades of follow-up.

What the research shows

Purpose is linked to a longer life

A meta-analysis pooled 10 prospective studies from the United States and Japan, covering 136,265 people (Cohen et al., 2016). People with a high sense of purpose, including Japanese studies measuring ikigai, had about 17% lower risk of death from any

cause and 17% lower risk of cardiovascular events. Results held across countries, ages and measurement methods.

Purpose is linked to a healthier aging brain

In a study of 951 older adults followed for up to 7 years, those with high purpose were about 2.4 times more likely to remain free of Alzheimer's disease than those with low purpose (Boyle et al., 2010). Purpose was also linked to lower risk of mild cognitive impairment and slower cognitive decline.

Ikigai is linked to healthy aging and happiness

A nationwide study of Japanese adults aged 65 and older tracked 30 health and wellbeing outcomes (Okuzono et al., 2022). Over three years, having ikigai was linked to 31% lower risk of functional disability and 36% lower risk of dementia. It was also linked to fewer depressive symptoms and greater happiness, life satisfaction and participation in hobbies.

Large Japanese studies confirm the link

In the Ohsaki Study of 43,391 Japanese adults followed for 7 years, people without ikigai had higher risk of death from any cause, including about 60% higher risk of cardiovascular death (Sone et al., 2008). In the Japan Collaborative Cohort Study of more than 73,000 adults followed for about 12.5 years, men and women with ikigai had lower long-term risk of death from all causes (Tanno et al., 2009).

What the research cannot yet show

These studies are observational: they show people with ikigai live longer and healthier lives, not that ikigai alone causes it. Most measured ikigai with a single self-reported question. Some Japanese studies found stronger links in men than in women, and researchers have called for trials testing whether building purpose improves health.

Disclaimer

This summary is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. It describes published research on the principles behind the journal; the journal itself has not been tested in a clinical study, and the studies above show associations, not guaranteed outcomes. Talk with a qualified healthcare provider about your individual health needs.

References

All sources are peer-reviewed and indexed in PubMed.

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