

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Taking a Walk Makes a Difference and Brain Health Matters

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today we are talking about the brain health benefits of taking a walk.***

Walking is good for us. It is good for our brains, good for our bodies, good for our mood and good for keeping us young. March 30 is National Take a Walk in a Park Day and we can't think of a better reason to put on your walking shoes!

If you look through the history of our [Brain Boosts](#) you will see many posts extolling the virtues of exercise, especially walking. In addition to the mood enhancement we get from walking it can also reduce the risk of depression and increase our cognitive function. And while we can't stop the aging process, exercise can help slow down the process as shown in this chart below [Harvard Health](#).

Walking helps increase oxygen flow to the brain. Maintaining even a moderate pace while walking raises our heart rate and causes us to breathe deeper. Those deep breaths get more oxygen get into the bloodstream, increasing circulation, and moving more oxygen to the brain. In addition, some of the benefits of walking are almost immediate. Recent research has shown that 20 to 30 minutes of walking or any exercise before taking on a task that requires brain power can quicken reaction time and sharpen decision making.

All of these benefits make today—and every day—a great day for a walk in the park, on the beach, your neighborhood, or favorite trail.

Exercise vs. Aging		
	Effect of Aging	Effect of Exercise
Heart and Circulation		
Resting heart rate	Increase	Decrease
Maximum heart rate	Decrease	Slows the decrease
Maximum pumping capacity	Decrease	Increase
Heart muscle stiffness	Increase	Decrease
Blood vessel stiffness	Increase	Decrease
Blood pressure	Increase	Decrease
Blood		
Number of red blood cells	Decrease	No change
Blood viscosity ("thickness")	Increase	Decrease
Lungs		
Maximum oxygen uptake	Decrease	No change
Intestines		
Speed of emptying	Decrease	Increase
Bones		
Calcium content and strength	Decrease	Increase
Muscles		
Muscle mass and strength	Decrease	Increase
Metabolism		
Metabolic rate	Decrease	Increase
Body fat	Increase	Decrease
Blood sugar	Increase	Decrease
Insulin levels	Increase	Decrease
LDL ("bad") cholesterol	Increase	Decrease
HDL ("good") cholesterol	Decrease	Increase
Sex hormone levels	Decrease	Slight decrease
Nervous system		
Nerve conduction and reflexes	Slower	Decrease
Quality of sleep	Decrease	Increase
Risk of depression	Increase	Decrease
Memory lapses	Increase	Decrease

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

There are so many benefits to walking, but here are some benefits from the BHI and [Harvard Health](#) that might surprise you.

- It counteracts your genetic tendency to gain weight. In a study of more than 12,000 people, Harvard researchers looked how much obesity-promoting genes actually contribute to body weight. Study participants who walked briskly for about an hour a day, were able to reduce the effects of those genes by 50 percent.
- It curbs your sweet tooth. Studies found that a 15-minute walk can reduce cravings for chocolate and sugary snacks — even in stressful situations.
- It reduces the risk of breast cancer. Any physical activity helps reduce the risk of breast cancer, but an American Cancer Society study found that women who walked seven or more hours a week had a lower risk of breast cancer than those who walked less than three hours a week. Even in women with increased breast cancer risk factors.
- It eases joint pain. Walking may be difficult if you have arthritis-related pain. But research shows that walking protects your joints, especially the knees and hips, by lubricating them and strengthening the muscles. Walking more than five miles a week before joint pain develops can help prevent arthritis from forming in the first place.
- It boosts your immunity. Walking can help protect you during cold and flu season and if you do get sick, your symptoms may be milder. Studies show people who walk use fewer sick days than those who exercised once a week or less.
- And don't forget to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote:
 - Stress resilience
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Social connection
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Meaning and Purpose
 - Cognitive stimulation and creativity
 - Engaging with nature
 - General health
 - Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching

Hospital, to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).