

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Walking Is Good for Brain and Body Health

*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 can have a significant impact on protecting your brain health and reducing the risk of brain illness. What's more, it's free and has practically no negative side effects!

Yes, this simple activity that you've been doing most of your life is being trumpeted (along with other forms of regular physical activity) as the closest thing we have to a wonder drug. A drug? Indeed, exercise is medicine and that includes walking. Walking increases blood flow to your brain, which is linked to better cognitive function, improved memory, and overall protection against decline. The good news is, walking more is a relatively accessible goal for most people.

Have you ever gone for a walk and ended it feeling full of energy, but also relaxed, focused and calm? Walking has long been recognized as both an effective form of physical exercise, as well as a tool to help gain mental clarity, increasing creativity, productivity and improving your mood. Multiple studies have found that walking is as effective as medication for decreasing depression. It can help improve your sleep and relieve everyday stresses, too. Your tension starts to ease as your mood-elevating, brain healthy endorphin levels increase.

The physical benefits of walking have been known for quite some time now — it's good for your heart, works your muscles, improves circulation, the list goes on. But what's becoming more and more prevalent are the positive effects walking can have on brain health. For example, walking helps increase oxygen flow to the brain. Maintaining even a moderate pace while walking raises your heart rate and causes you to breathe deeper. Those deep breaths get more oxygen get into the bloodstream, increase your circulation, and move more oxygen to the brain.

And moving more oxygen to the brain is a very good thing. Your brain uses about 20 percent of the body's total oxygen supply, so if it is not getting enough oxygen, it's easy to feel a mental fog, unfocused, with decreased energy, creativity, and mood. On top of that, about a third of the brain is made up of blood vessels, so it's no wonder that substantial blood flow is important to brain

health. In fact, increased blood flow to the brain is linked to better cognitive function, improved memory and attention, and overall protection against decline in performance.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

- Go for a walk. Take a hike.
- The Physical Activity Guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommend all adults to get 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise per week (for example, 30 minutes on each of five days) or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity. Depending upon your speed and intensity, walking can be classified as moderate or vigorous.

The guidelines provide a good target, but there is plenty of research that shows walking has benefits even if you don't hit the recommendations. As they say, some is always better than none, but more is better than some. Particularly when it comes to reducing your risk for heart disease or brain illness, walking longer or faster lowers your risk more than shorter walks or walking at slower paces. And the faster you walk as you age, the more you may increase your lifespan.

### How much activity do I need?

#### Moderate-intensity aerobic activity

Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts.



Tight on time this week? **Start with just 5 minutes.** It all adds up!

From the U.S. Health and Human Services Move Your Way campaign.

**About the Brain Health Initiative ([www.brainhealthinitiative.org](http://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](#).