

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Brain Health Benefits of Having a Pet

*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. Research suggests pets are good for our health. So, in honor of National Pet Day on April 11, we honor our pets.*

Our pets are family, at least they are for the more than 85 million households who count at least one pet as a resident. But our pets bring us more than unconditional love, joy, and companionship. Research shows that having a pet can protect our brain and physical health and even extend our life.

According to [Harvard Health](#), research shows bonding with an animal can have an immediate and long-lasting impact on our brain health and sense of well-being. Studies show regular interaction with animals may increase brain health protective factors by boosting levels of oxytocin and production of serotonin, the feel-good brain chemicals, which may explain why petting animals is so calming.

Getting a pet helps keep our minds and bodies active. The ongoing nurturing, feeding, caring, and grooming our pets keeps our brain engaged. If our pet is a dog, the daily walks and play time get us outside and physically active. In addition to being good companions, pets can also help reduce brain health risk factors by decreasing stress and preventing feelings of depression and loneliness — especially for people who live alone. Having a friendly face to come home to can help prevent isolation.

Pets also provide therapy for the sick and elderly. Animal-assisted therapy is used in hospitals to aid in treatment and recovery. In one study, daily visits with therapy dogs helped cancer patients lower their stress levels and the fear associated with radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Retirement centers and nursing facilities often use animal-assisted therapy to help residents with depression and stress, as well as support the challenges of aging and even assist with grief.

Having a pet isn't for everyone, but there are other ways to get a healthy dose of animal therapy. The Suncoast is home to many rescue, shelter and adoption organizations who are always in need

of donations and volunteers. Helping animals can help provide us with a sense of purpose and we may even feel motivated to take one of those fuzzy, little faces home.

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

Whether you are looking for volunteer opportunities or a new family member, these are just a few organizations in our area that can provide you with some animal therapy.

- [Bishop Animal Shelter SPCA](#)
- [Cat Depot](#)
- [Forget-Me-Not Inc.](#)
- [Gulf Shore Animal League](#)
- [Humane Society at Lakewood Ranch](#)
- [Humane Society of Manatee County](#)
- [Humane Society of Sarasota County](#)
- [Manatee County Animal Services](#)
- [Nate's Honor Animal Rescue](#)
- [Satchel's Last Resort](#)

And for you and your pet, remember 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](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](#).