

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Enjoy a Brain Healthy Picnic

*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. **In this Boost, we talk about incorporating brain healthy foods into your picnic.***

The word picnic may be derived from the French word *piqueunique*, but the concept of enjoying a simple meal outdoors with family and friends is as All-American as apple pie.

Summer is peak picnic season for most of the country, even though here on Florida's Suncoast we have the luxury of dining outdoors year-round. But whether we are picnicking while traveling around the country or dining out in our own backyards, there are plenty of ways to eat simply, safely, and brain healthy.

When choosing food for a picnic it is important to select food that won't wilt, melt, or spoil easily in the heat. Brain healthy choices include fresh firm vegetables — either raw or cooked, fresh fruit and berries, avocado, whole grain bread and pasta, beans, seeds, nuts, and dark chocolate. While popular at picnics, dishes made with dairy or mayonnaise — including potato salad and deviled eggs — are highly perishable and can spoil in less than an hour in the hot sun.

If grilling is on the menu, hamburgers and hot dogs may be the popular choice, but the nitrates, high sodium content, and carcinogens produced by grilling make them unhealthy choices. Instead, try grilling fish, lean poultry trimmed of any visible fat, veggie burgers, or fresh veggies for a brain-healthy alternative.

And don't forget to hydrate and limit alcohol in the heat of the summer. A healthy person needs up to 50 ounces of water a day, even more when we are outside and active. Instead of packing a heavy cooler with lots of drink options, offer guests reusable, insulated water bottles that can be refilled with natural, sugar-free beverages — think ice water, juices made from whole fruits like dark berries (blueberry or cherry) or pitted fruits, or green tea. If alcoholic drinks are being served, encourage guests to drink water between alcoholic drinks. This keeps them hydrated and can help reduce the amount of alcohol they drink.

Whether it's a backyard barbecue or a picnic on the road, make sure the menu includes foods that are nutritious, safe and brain healthy.



Looking for a healthy dish for your next picnic? Packed with flavor and antioxidants, this [Wild Blueberry Orzo Salad](#) from [WildBlueberries.com](#) definitely fits the bill.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The foods you eat impact your brain and body health and performance, as well as your ability to fight brain and physical illness. The BHI recommends including these brain healthy choices in your family's meals — including picnics — whenever possible.

- **Green leafy vegetables.** Kale, spinach, collard greens, and broccoli are rich in vitamin K, lutein, folate, and beta carotene —all which can help slow cognitive decline.
- **Fish.** Salmon, cod, light tuna, and pollack are all high in omega-3 fatty acids (and low in mercury) and are linked to lower levels of the protein clumps found in the brains of people with Alzheimer's.
- **Berries.** Strawberries and blueberries get their color and memory-improving ability from flavonoids.
- **Caffeine.** Research shows caffeine consumption leads to better scores on mental function tests and helps solidify new memories.
- **Nuts.** Nuts are an excellent source of protein and healthy fats, and walnuts may also improve memory. Walnuts are high in a type of omega-3 fatty acid called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), linked to lower blood pressure and cleaner arteries. Studies have also linked higher walnut consumption to improved cognitive test scores.
- **Seeds:** Seeds like flaxseed, chia, sesame, pumpkin, and sunflower are great sources of fiber. They also contain healthy monounsaturated fats (good fat), polyunsaturated fats and many important vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. They can help reduce blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure, all risk factors for brain illness.
- **Avocado.** Avocados are full of monounsaturated fats, which helps keep sugar levels steady, as well as improve brain health! Since avocados also contain vitamin K and folate, they may help prevent blood clots (protecting against

stroke), as well as may help to improve cognitive function, especially memory and concentration. They're also rich in vitamins B and C, which your body doesn't store, and helps boost your immune system.

- **Dark chocolate.** Dark chocolate is rich in antioxidants and has been shown to reduce inflammation and lower blood pressure.
- **Green tea.** Green tea is an excellent beverage choice for a picnic. It is high in antioxidants and is shown to improve blood flow, prevent a range of heart-related issues, stabilize blood sugar levels, and lower cholesterol. Studies also show green tea helps block the formation of the plaques that are linked to Alzheimer's disease.
- And don't forget to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:
 - 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](#).