



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Pick a New Hobby - Your Brain Will Thank You and Reward You

*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. **Why not pick up a new skill in the new year to promote and protect your brain health?***

January is National Hobby Month, the perfect opportunity to celebrate your favorite pastime or try out a new activity. But did you know that starting a new hobby, or reconnecting with an old one, can have positive effects on your brain, especially as you age?

According to a recent post from [Harvard Health](#), a process called brain plasticity gives your brain the ability to change and adapt in response to stimuli by reorganizing its structure, functions, or connections. Examples of activities that encourage brain plasticity are navigating new areas, learning to speak a second language, or beginning to play a new musical instrument.

But it's important to train the brain on a regular basis to experience optimum results.

“Eventually, your cognitive skills will wane, and thinking and memory will be more challenging, so you need to build up your reserve,” said Dr. John N. Morris, director of social and health policy research at the Harvard-affiliated Institute for Aging Research. “Embracing a new activity that also forces you to think and learn and requires ongoing practice can keep the brain healthy.”

Dr. Morris suggests following these three guidelines to maximize brain training:

- **Make sure the activity is challenging.** Engaging your brain to learn something new is key. With an existing hobby, you could endeavor to improve your skill.
- **Don't keep it simple, stupid.** Complex activities force your brain to work on problem solving and creative thinking. Examples would be digital photography or quilting.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** The activity should require some level of practice. But Dr. Morris says the constant repetition is important, not necessarily the quest for vast improvement.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

While it is true that many activities improve brain health and function, not all hobbies are created equal when it comes to stimulating the brain. In July 2020, the website DIYS.com asked 4,694 volunteers to participate in an IQ test before and after starting a new hobby. Following are the top hobbies found to improve IQ:

- **Learning a new instrument** – Research indicates playing a musical instrument engages every part of the brain at once.
- **Knitting** – The act of knitting has been shown to increase concentration levels.
- **Exercising** – Those who exercise regularly have a larger brain volume in memory.
- **Reading** – Both reading and writing (see below) allow you to expand or express your thoughts and improve your vocabulary.
- **Yoga/Meditation** – Yoga increases strength and flexibility. Both yoga and meditation give people clarity, peace of mind, and are stress relievers.
- **Learning a new language** – Benefits to the brain include increased memory function and a boost in creativity.
- **Gardening** – Research shows gardening can even help improve your mood, lower your risk of dementia, and relieve stress.
- **Making and editing videos, trying new recipes every week and starting to write/blog** also made the top 10 list of new hobbies that improved cognitive functioning and well-being in the study cohort.

There are plenty of resources to connect you with brain healthy activities near you. Visit [Lakewood Ranch Community Activities](#), [MVP Sports and Social](#), and [Lakewood Ranch Clubs](#) for the most up-to-date information. Also check out the [Manatee Calendar of Events](#), [Sarasota Calendar of Events](#) and [Festival Calendar](#).

- **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), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the

lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address 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](#).