



## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Rooms Full of Houseplants Offer More Than a Pretty Environment

*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. **Houseplants offer a more pleasing atmosphere, especially for those of us who can remember to water them. Today, we look at health benefits that emerge when you grace your space with greenery.***

Looking for a new co-worker or roommate to provide a little companionship and make your life easier? Consider the humble houseplant. Homes and workplaces that feature plenty of plants offer myriad health benefits.

There is evidence that indoor gardening can reduce stress levels. In a study published in the Journal of Physiological Anthropology, participants were given two tasks: repotting a house plant or doing a short computer-based task. Those who did the gardening had a lower stress response, while the computer task produced a spike in heart rate and blood pressure, even though the participants were young men comfortable with computer work.

In other research, horticultural therapy has been found to be successful in increasing brain healthy feelings of well-being among people with depression, anxiety, and dementia. Medical clinics in England even prescribe potting plants for patients with the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Depending on what types of plants you grow indoors, you might reduce allergens by keeping dust and mold out of the air (Chinese Evergreen, Peace Lily), increase air moisture (Spider Plants) and oxygen (Gerbera Daisy), enhance digestion (Peppermint, Spearmint and Basil), produce relaxing herbal medicine (Lavender), or soothe a wound (Aloe).

There is not agreement, however, on the common conception that houseplants filter contaminants from the air. Research in the 1980s by NASA concluded houseplants and roots reduced airborne organic compounds in a sealed spacecraft. But more recent studies conducted in more realistic settings have not produced similar results. In fact, this [Harvard report](#) aims to

settle the issue with the headline “House Plants Don’t Really Clean Indoor Air.”

Interestingly, though, the agreed-upon brain health benefits of houseplants seem to extend to the virtual world. Harvard University completed a pair of studies of virtual reality looking into the effects of biophilic design, literally “the love of life and living things” in workplace connectivity to the natural environment. The studies showed that the use of biophilic elements in virtual environments resulted in decreased risk of brain illness risk factors, including lower blood pressure, heart rate and anxiety levels in respondents compared to non-biophilic environments. The results were similar to real world biophilic design studies.

Researchers concluded that those who engage in fast-paced jobs in sparse environments could benefit from a virtual reality pod that features natural environments to relax and reduce stress and anxiety.

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

*Are you interested in getting greener around your home but don’t know where to start? The BHI offers this list of houseplants to get you started.*

- **PLANTS THAT ARE EASY TO KEEP ALIVE:** Peace Lily, Marble Queen Pothos, Tillandsia Ionantha.
- **PLANTS THAT DON’T NEED MUCH LIGHT:** Zamioculcas Zamiifolia (ZZ Plant), Cast Iron Plant.
- **PLANTS THAT DON’T NEED MUCH SPACE:** Snake Plant, African Violet.
- **PLANTS THAT ARE BEST FOR PET OWNERS:** Bird’s Nest Fern, Pilea Peperomioides (Chinese Money Plant).
- **PLANTS THAT FLOWER INDOORS:** Blooming Anthurium, Petite Orange Orchid.
- **PLANTS THAT GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE:** Philodendron Plant, Spider Plant, Cacti.
- **PLANTS WHEN YOU’RE READY FOR A CHALLENGE:** Monstera Deliciosa, Fiddle Leaf Fig Bush.

**Tip: Smile** when you care for your plants. Touch them and talk to them; it will add an extra **BOOST** to your brain.

**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](http://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](#).