

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Brain Health Matters and Gut Health Makes a Difference

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 fighting brain illness for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Today, the BHI is talking about employing a brain healthy lifestyle to support gut health with direct implications for optimizing brain performance and fighting brain illness, like anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairment.

#### Connection between brain and gut health and an anxious stomach

Research shows there is a powerful connection between our brain and our gut, and the health of both. Our central nervous system regulates our life-sustaining functions and the enteric nervous system helps regulate digestion. Often called the ‘second brain,’ the enteric nervous system uses the same neurons and neurotransmitters as the central nervous system. It senses that we have food in our belly and starts moving the food through the digestion process while communicating with the central nervous system.

Many of us have suffered with gastrointestinal issues at some point in our lives. Up to 70 percent of us have had to deal with pain, bloating, and discomfort that has no apparent cause. It turns out that stomach issues are among the most common symptoms of brain illness associated with stress and anxiety.

So, it stands to reason that if we are experiencing brain illness symptoms associated with stress or anxiety, our digestive process may be temporarily disrupted causing indigestion, stomach cramps, diarrhea, constipation, loss of appetite, hunger, nausea, and even irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and ulcers. Unfortunately, the process works both ways; if we are experiencing persistent gastrointestinal problems it can increase our risk for brain illness and heighten symptoms associated with anxiety and stress.

Research shows that treating our anxiety can help reduce our digestive distress. Cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation therapy, and hypnosis have all been shown to be effective in relieving stress and anxiety and supporting our brain-gut connection.

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

The BHI and [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) offer these tips for calming an anxious stomach:

1. **Take short breaks and breathe.** Throughout the day, stop for one minute of slow, quiet deep breathing. Breathe slowly and silently through your nose. Push your stomach out when you inhale and let it deflate as you exhale.
2. **Just say “no.”** Doing everything for everybody is a recipe for stress. Know your limits and don’t accept more than you can handle.
3. **Get moving.** Even 15 minutes of physical activity can reduce stress. Brain healthy endorphins released during exercise interact with receptors in your brain and trigger a positive feeling in your body. Exercise, take a walk, or try yoga — just get moving.
4. **Focus on what is within your control.** Worrying about your stomach, only makes your symptoms worse. Your thoughts and reactions are your choice. Accepting your stomach problems can reduce your anxiety and curb your symptoms.
5. **Practice guided relaxation.** In addition to feeling relaxed, you may experience a sense of calm that lasts for hours afterwards.
6. **Adopt a brain healthier lifestyle.** Practice thoughts, behaviors, emotions, language, and reactions 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 works collaboratively with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance 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 brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).