

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Food Makes a Difference in Your Teen Athlete's Mood

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 across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Today, the BHI is talking about how diet impacts the mood of your teen athlete.

Many teens are moody — it's just part of their job description. There can be many causes for their ever-changing moods: stress over grades, peer pressure, hormones, and for student athletes, there may be anxiety related to competition or performance. But there may be an easy way to help improve the mood of our student athletes — improving their diet.

As the BHI has shared, what we eat — and don't eat — can influence our brain health and performance. Diets high in saturated fat, refined carbohydrates, and processed food products (common among teenagers) can combine with everyday stress, possibly increasing the risk for brain illness, including depression and anxiety disorders. Eating the right foods is not a replacement for professional guidance for teens who suffer from symptoms of brain illness. However, a brain healthy diet can help improve their mood, energy level, performance in school and on the athletic field, brain health, and overall health.

As parents, we can make sure our teens have plenty of healthy food options. It may not bring about big changes, but eating the right foods may make them a little less grumpy.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The Brain Health Initiative recommends these five foods to help improve the mood and brain health of your teen athlete.

- **Omega-3s.** Omega-3 fatty acids are critical to brain health, performance, and development, but they can also help lower incidence of brain illness, such as levels of depression. Studies show that consuming foods rich in omega-3s (e.g., salmon, walnuts, flaxseed and chia), can increase mood and performance and reduce the symptoms of depression. If your teen athlete is a picky eater, try sneaking a teaspoon of chia or flax into a smoothie or salad dressing.
- **Fermented foods.** As the BHI has shared in previous *Brain Boost* posts, there is evidence that a happy gut equals a happy brain, so make sure your teen athlete's diet includes plenty of the good bacteria that helps break down food for digestion and keeps his or her body running like it should. Save your money when it comes to probiotics by adding flavor and healthy gut bacteria to their diet with probiotic-rich fermented foods like yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, or kombucha.
- **Food containing tryptophan.** Tryptophan is a micronutrient. It plays a key role in the production of serotonin, a feel-good hormone in the brain. Foods containing tryptophan include: egg yolks; tree nuts like almonds, cashews, and walnuts; and sesame, pumpkin, and sunflower seeds. In addition, some tree nuts provide other key micronutrients for optimal brain function.
- **High-fiber foods.** Foods high in fiber also help keep the gut in balance, so pack your teen's diet with plenty of fiber-rich fruits and vegetables. In addition to supporting the good bacteria they help keep the digestive tract clean and running. Fiber also helps feed the short-chain fatty acids in the gut and studies show those short-chain fatty acids may also increase resistance to brain illness and decrease symptoms of stress and anxiety.
- **Breakfast foods.** Teens are busy and, in their rush to get to school or an early practice, they either skip breakfast or grab a quick, over-processed, high sugar option that causes an immediate spike in blood sugar. But that temporary spike comes with a crash and can send your teen right back to grumpy. A good breakfast featuring protein and complex carbohydrates can help decrease your teen's stress, alleviate symptoms of depression, and improve their quality of life while optimizing performance. And don't skip the yolks when scrambling eggs: The fat found in the yolk of free-range eggs is high in omega-3s and other mood-boosting micronutrients.

You can also help your teen by encouraging him or her to **adopt a brain healthy lifestyle**, including 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)

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](#).