

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Better Balance 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 across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Today, the BHI is talking about the link between balance and brain health.

As we age, our ability to remain steady on our feet can become an issue. Age and medication can both impact our balance, but good balance is something that we can work to maintain both with our bodies and with our brains.

It makes sense that there are exercises and physical activities that can help us prevent the risk of falling, but staying mentally active can also help keep us on our feet. Our brain is at the center of our balance. It starts in the inner ear, which senses our head motions. Our body's somatosensory system, a complex system of sensory neurons and neural pathways that respond to changes at the surface or inside the body, relays the feeling of the ground beneath our feet. And our vision provides the visual clues that allow us to avoid obstacles around us. Our brain takes in all this information, plans our movements, and carries them out safely.

In addition, brain-related illnesses including sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression may also increase our risk of falling. Some anti-anxiety drugs, certain antidepressants and several sleep medications can cause drowsiness and make us less steady on our feet. If you are being treated for any of these conditions, use extra caution while taking those medications.

In an article for [Harvard Health Publishing](#), Harvard Medical School instructor Brad Manor, PhD, emphasizes that as we age, cognition plays a big role in maintaining balance and preventing falls. Keeping our body and brain fit and healthy keeps us mentally sharp and helps us to navigate the ever-shifting obstacles that we face every day. Graham Anderson (MS, CSCS, USAW-1), owner of [Anchor Fitness & Performance in Lakewood Ranch](#), says "the ability to perform balance driven movements not only helps stability and neuromuscular control of

under-utilized tissue, but it also increases metabolism (which promotes weight loss) by reinvigorating dormant muscles!”

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

There are many exercises that combine strengthening your core, improving your balance while reducing your risk of falling, enhancing your brain health and optimizing your brain performance. Here are just a few that are easy to do on your own that engage your body and your brain. When you are just starting out, hold on to the wall or a sturdy piece of furniture for balance if needed, but as you get stronger try to perform the moves without holding on to anything.

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart in front of a step (the bottom step of a staircase will work) or low piece of furniture. Slowly raise one foot to tap the step then slowly return it to the floor. Perform 15 to 20 reps, then repeat on the opposite leg
- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and slowly move your head from side to side then up and down while keep your body as still as possible. Do this for 30 seconds, and repeat. If you get dizzy, pause and move your head more slowly. If you’re still dizzy, stop.
- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and lift one knee until your upper leg is parallel to the floor (or as close as you can go). Keep your torso straight. Pause, then slowly return your foot to the floor. Perform 20 reps, alternating between legs.
- Standing in front of a chair, slowly lower your hips to the chair as gently as possible. Pause, and without swinging your torso, push through your heels to stand up. Perform 10 repetitions.
- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and lift one foot an inch off the floor. Keep your torso straight and don’t lean toward your planted foot. Hold for 10 to 15 seconds, then slowly return your foot to the floor. Repeat on the opposite leg. Perform five stands on each leg.
- Stand with your feet hip-width apart at one end of a hallway or room and look behind you over one shoulder. Take four to five steps forward while continuing to look over your shoulder. Switch your view to the other shoulder and take four to five more steps forward. Perform five repetitions on each side.

Want to learn more about maintaining balance? Check out Better Balance from Harvard Health Publishing. Purchase this special report to learn how the body maintains balance and the conditions, medications, and situations that can create instability. It also provides tips for preventing falls at home and guides you through a series of workouts and exercises that will increase your stability and confidence.

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](#).