

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Training your Brain to be Happy 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 using mindfulness to increase your happiness and overall well-being.

Happiness, like all states of being, lives in your head

Yes, 2020 has been a difficult year and it may seem that there is a great deal depleting our happiness bucket. Yet, there are ways to find happiness during difficult times, and we can train our brains to do that.

Many of us are constantly checking our smartphones. We're multitasking and upsetting our work-life balance because we have so much to do. But these are the things that may be robbing us of the very happiness, peace, and joy we crave.

Luckily, there are many relatively simple remedies that allow us to train our brains to increase our level of happiness. Today the BHI is focusing on mindfulness—the practice of purposely focusing our attention on the present moment. Mindfulness is one of the keys to increased happiness and a healthier brain and body.

Think about the people around us who are happy. Do they have issues and fears? Of course they do, but they seem to have the ability to see beyond them and stay focused on their happiness. They are likely practicing mindfulness and other techniques to increase their positive emotions, level of happiness, and overall well-being.

Mindfulness doesn't mean eliminating fear or blocking out the negative things happening around us. It's a state of being that makes it OK to be and experience happiness, to love ourselves, and

to achieve success, despite those things. It is a set of skills and an orientation to life that involves monitoring and accepting what is happening in the present moment.

Monitoring is slowing down and deliberately focusing on different aspects of our experience—our bodies, our thoughts, our emotions, our senses, and our environment. If our attention wanders while monitoring, we notice the shift and can deliberately bring it back to whatever we are focused on.

Acceptance allows these experiences to be. By accepting them with kindness, gentleness, and openness, without judgement, we find the middle ground between suppressing our feelings or over-identifying with them. Acceptance increases positive feelings because it changes the meaning of the source of our stress, making it more tolerable. We become more open to the present moment and our naturally arising feelings of contentment, interest, pride, and happiness.

Practicing mindfulness and other brain boosting techniques can liberate us from the stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts and emotions we face every day. It can also help us train our brains to be happier, healthier, and higher performing.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Mindfulness is one tool for increasing brain health, fighting brain illness, and optimizing brain performance. Practicing mindfulness is fast, easy, and free; you just need to make the choice to take action. Try replacing a social media binge with just one of the tools below and you should quickly see the results.

- **Register.** Join us for the reimagined Mindful Triathlon on Nov. 14. From 9:30 to 11 a.m. at Bob Gardner Park in Lakewood Ranch. We will complete a virtual 'mindful' morning with a 5k run/walk, followed by an upbeat yoga session, and guided meditation. [Click here](#) for more information or to register.
- **Meditate.** Meditation is a skill. Learning to meditate is like learning any new skill. Try starting small. Even just a few minutes a day can have a profound impact on centering you in the moment. If you need some help, mobile apps like [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#) can help make the learning process easy and sustainable.
- **Be present.** Feel grounded in the present moment—whatever it is. Be fully present in your meetings, be mindful of the food you're eating and the act of nourishing your body, feel the power of your body while exercising. These simple opportunities for awareness will help you stay present in every moment.
- **Be aware.** Feeling angry or agitated? Do a quick check-in with your body. Instead of giving in to negative emotions, try to identify why they exist. Then you can choose to stay in that emotion or take action to alleviate it.
- **Keep a journal.** Writing down your thoughts helps you stay aware of what's happening in your life and how you feel. It also helps you get things off your chest, detach from their energy, and see the bigger picture.
- **Step back from social media.** This tool created to increase connection can disconnect you from others and yourself. It can also be a time suck. Happy people maintain a healthy relationship to social media.

- **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](#).