

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Holiday Shopping Anxiety 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, we are looking at the experience of COVID-19 pandemic anxiety on holiday shopping.

Black Friday looked very different this year — as has most everything in 2020. There were still shoppers out at the crack of dawn, but nothing like what we have seen in years' past with mall parking lots overflowing and police directing traffic at the big-box stores. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased anxiety about many aspects of daily living, including changing the way we are shopping this year. This is having an impact on both consumers and retailers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ranks shopping in a crowded store as being at high-risk for spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Results of a [recent poll](#) by Deloitte show 57 percent of consumers said they're anxious about shopping in stores over the holidays, and more than 61 percent intend to shop online.

According to [CNBC](#), consumers started their online shopping earlier this year, loading up their online carts instead of their trunks. And while we may feel safer shopping from the comfort of our living rooms, retailers are scrambling to prevent their own anxiety as a result of fewer shoppers in the stores. Many are adapting to these changing shopping patterns by investing heavily in digital commerce to make sure they can handle the increased traffic on their websites and mobile apps.

In a recent post in [Working Knowledge](#), Harvard Business School faculty members shared their insights into what this holiday season looks like and what retailers need to do to decrease shoppers' anxiety, survive the changes to retail shopping, and even find success. One word appears over and over in their analysis: innovate. From focusing on customer service to creative engagement, the professors are in agreement that shopping online will continue to grow and

that those retailers who can find new ways to reach customers and offer a safe, stress-free shopping environment will survive.

Consumers who shop in person may be anxious about crowds and lines, and those shopping online may worry about receiving gifts on time. Successful retailers will need to be proactive in addressing consumer anxiety. By being highly focused on customer service, retailers can earn consumers trust and decrease their stress. Another key for retailers will be training staff to enforce rapidly changing public health guidelines. Diffusing tension with customers who don't comply with mask-wearing recommendations will be critical for keeping the peace among shoppers — as well as keeping shoppers and staff healthy and physically strong against the virus.

There is good news for retailers, though. Because many entertainment venues are closed and travel is limited, it is predicted that more of us will be spending our holiday dollars on retail goods as opposed to services — such as concerts, travel, and dining out — this holiday season.

These changes brought about by COVID-19 may increase our resilience to stress, reduce some of our anxiety, and could change how we shop for years to come. The trend of spending time and money online could become a permanent change in the retail industry.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The Brain Health Initiative offers the following suggestions for protecting your physical and brain health while holiday shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Shop safe.** If being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 is causing you stress, shopping online is the best way to protect yourself while shopping. If you do shop in person try to avoid crowds, wear a mask, and wash your hands well when you get home.
- **Shop early.** The surge in online shopping can bring shipping bottlenecks and delays in delivery. Don't create additional anxiety for yourself this holiday season by waiting until the last-minute to order gifts online.
- **Ship early.** If you are shipping packages to family and friends that you won't see during the holidays, those same shipping delays can impact delivery of your packages. Instead of worrying if your packages will arrive on time, plan to ship them before the holiday deadlines.
- And as always, **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](#).