

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Enjoying Nature Boosts Brain Health and Brain Health Matters

*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.*

Research suggests that spending time in nature can promote our brain health and fight brain illness as we reduce our stress and anxiety and lighten our mood. We are lucky — living in Florida we have a wide variety of opportunities for getting outdoors. But why do we feel better when we can get outside and enjoy nature?

Researchers studying [ecotherapy](#), nature-based programs that address brain and physical health, have been able to link experiencing and enjoying nature with boosting brain health and performance. For example, data demonstrates that ecotherapy increases creativity, energy, immunity, and productivity and it also reduces experience of brain health risk factors like stress, and decreases symptoms of brain illnesses, such as anxiety and depression.

In an article in [Harvard Health Publishing](#), Jason Strauss, MD, director of geriatric psychiatry at Harvard-affiliated Cambridge Health Alliance, said that when we are depressed or stressed, we can get into a cycle of negativity. Nature can have a calming effect on those negative thoughts. Being in nature can actually lower our blood pressure and reduce our levels of cortisol, the stress hormone that erodes brain health and makes us vulnerable to brain illness.

It's not the setting that matters. The key is finding a place that you enjoy and letting the natural environment surround you, lightening mood, and bringing you a sense of calm.

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

It's easy to add nature into your lifestyle. Look for something that you enjoy and immerse yourself in nature for 20 or 30 minutes.

- **Take a walk.** The Suncoast has dozens of nature trails. Find one close by and take a walk while listening and breathing in what is around you.
- **Go bird watching.** The Sarasota Audubon Society Celery Fields are an ideal place for watching birds and wildlife.
- **Go to the beach.** Florida's beaches were made for walking. Splash in the waves, look for shells, and breathe in the salt air.
- **Stop and smell the roses.** The Suncoast's public gardens provide a beautiful place to enjoy nature.
- And as always, remember to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY**. 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](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 is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, 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 of the BHI's Brain Health Boosts, [click here](#).