

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



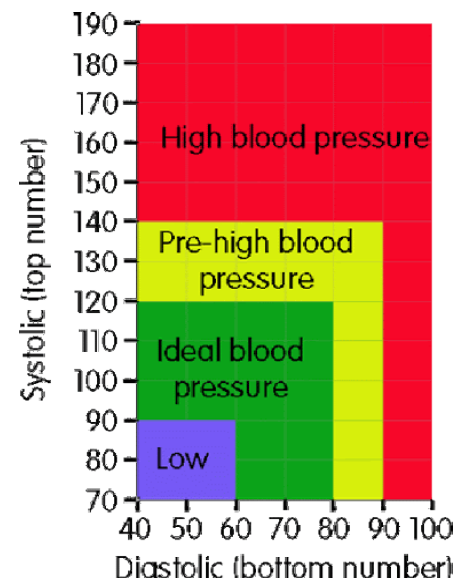
### Blood Pressure is a Brain Health Risk Factor and Brain Health Matters

*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. In this second part of a two-part series we are looking at the effect high blood pressure has on your brain health.*

High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects about 29 percent of the adults in this country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that percentage rises to more than 63 percent of adults between the ages of 40 and 59. The dangers of high blood pressure are well-known: stroke, heart attack, kidney disease, eye disease, and blood vessel damage. Based on new research we can now add to that list: high blood pressure has been shown to be a risk factor for brain illness, including symptoms of cognitive decline.

[Blood pressure](#) measures the force with which blood moves through our body. The higher of the two numbers, systolic blood pressure, is measured while your heart is pumping blood into your arteries. The lower number, diastolic blood pressure, is recorded when the heart is relaxing and refilling with blood between beats. Normal blood pressure is a systolic rate below 120 and diastolic rate below 80, or 120/80.

Research published by [The American Heart Association](#) links high blood pressure to risks for brain illness including stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, and vascular cognitive impairment. Because high blood pressure damages our blood vessels it stands to reason that it decreases brain performance, contributing to cognitive impairment, and increases risk of brain illness by restricting blood flow in the brain.



An article from [Harvard Health Publishing](#) points out the higher our blood pressure and the longer it persists without treatment, the greater the risk to our brain health. It also suggests that treating high blood pressure is crucial to improving brain performance and slowing, and even preventing, cognitive decline.

European studies of long-term therapy for hypertension show it reduced the risk of dementia by more than 50 percent in participants. Studies in this country also show promise, linking treatment to a 38 percent lower risk of cognitive decline.

One such study followed men being treated for high blood pressure over several years. Men have a higher risk for high blood pressure until they reach their mid-60s, when the numbers between men and women even out. The study found that the men who received treatment for their high blood pressure had a 65 percent lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease than men with untreated hypertension.

The studies also suggest that treatment is beneficial even if someone is experiencing mild cognitive impairment. Treating their high blood pressure may help prevent further damage and prevent further loss of brain performance.

Research continues in all of these areas to help scientists better understand how to protect our brain health, promote optimal performance and fight brain illness across the lifespan.

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

There are many things you can do to control your blood pressure and protect your brain health. The BHI suggests these nine steps.

1. **Know your blood pressure.** You can take your own blood pressure at home or at a pharmacy with a blood pressure machine. Talk to your doctor if your numbers are higher than 120/80.
2. **Watch your diet.** Consume a brain healthy diet and reduce your intake of sodium, animal fat and processed food, and make sure you eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fish. A good diet can lower systolic blood pressure by 10 to 22 points. Learn more in our [Brain Boost: Food for Mood, Food for Thought, and Food for Staying Healthy](#).
3. **Moderate exercise** is important to protect your brain and body health and fight brain illness, while also improving your daily brain performance. In fact, some studies have shown moderate exercise to be better for you than intense exercise. Walking for 30 minutes a day is one way to lower your systolic pressure by 4 to 9 points. Find out more about [American Physical Activity guidelines](#).
4. **Manage your weight.** If you follow numbers 2 and 3, you'll get there. If you're overweight, by losing just 20 pounds you can expect an additional drop of 5 to 20 points in your blood pressure.
5. **Moderate alcohol use.** Heavy drinking will increase your blood pressure so try to keep alcohol use to a brain healthy level of one to two drinks a day. Check out our [Brain Boost about drinking in moderation](#).
6. **Use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) sparingly.** Long-term use of ibuprofen, naproxen, and other NSAIDs for pain relief can increase your blood pressure, especially as you age.
7. **Manage your stress.** Finding time to relax can help you boost your brain health and optimize your daily performance while fighting brain illness and keep your pressure down. Find out more in our [Brain Boost: Building a Brain Healthy Resilience During Times of Stress](#).

8. **Take your medication.** If you need more help managing your blood pressure your doctor can prescribe medication to help.
9. **BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a Brain Healthy Lifestyle,** for you and your child, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses and language that promote:
  - a. Stress resilience
  - b. Nutrition
  - c. Physical activity
  - d. Sleep
  - e. Social connection
  - f. Emotional wellbeing
  - g. Meaning and Purpose
  - h. Cognitive stimulation and creativity
  - i. Engaging with nature
  - j. General health
  - k. 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, 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](#).