

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST

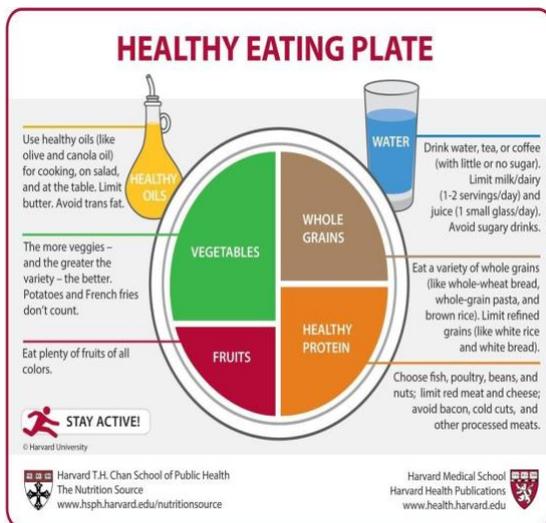


### Eating Right as We Age Makes a Difference and Brain Health Matters

*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. **This week we are focusing on the brain health protective factor of nutrition and the importance of eating the right foods to optimize healthy aging.***

Most of us worry about what our kids eat, but it is equally important that we continue to eat the right foods as we age. Eating right can keep our bodies and our brains healthy, optimize performance, and decrease our risk of brain illness as we age, while preserving our quality of life.

Age can have a serious impact on our eating habits. It takes fewer calories to fuel our bodies as we age, and our appetite can be affected by diminished senses of smell and taste. Add to that the side effects of medications we may take, the depression and social isolation experienced by many older adults and the effects of chronic diseases (such as heart disease and dementia), and you have a perfect recipe for poor nutritional intake.



There are ways to overcome these barriers to healthy eating, such as the Healthy Eating Plate from the [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/). Aim to fill half the plate with vegetables, a quarter with whole grains such as quinoa, brown rice, or whole-wheat bread, and the final quarter of the plate with lean protein such as fish, poultry, beans, nuts and seeds, or eggs.

Other areas to focus on include getting plenty of fiber and drinking plenty of fluids. We can also replace unhealthy saturated fats with healthy fats, including

olive and avocado oil, natural peanut butter, avocado, and fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel.

For those of us trying to maintain a healthy body weight, the key is reducing portion sizes without sacrificing a balanced meal. The same is true for people needing to gain a few pounds; increase portion sizes and stay away from processed foods, added sugar, salt, and saturated fat.

Sometimes we have to be creative when it comes to getting the right nutrition for a healthy brain and healthy body. If it's hard to get to the grocery store, try ordering groceries online and have them delivered. Online shopping makes it easier to avoid those impulse buys, too. It can be hard to cook for one or two if we have always prepared meals for a family, but most meals can easily be prepared and stored for another — so go ahead and cook for a group.

Most of all, remember to eat right and keep moving. We are living longer and, by eating right and being active, we will also live better and bridge the gap between lifespan and brainspan.

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

There are a number of foods that help protect your physical and brain health. [Harvard Health](#) suggests focusing on these food groups to support your nutritional needs.

- **Protein.** Protein is necessary for tissue growth, repair, and maintenance. Good sources of protein include nuts and seeds, legumes, eggs, nonfat or low-fat dairy products, fish and seafood, poultry and lean meat. But watch your portion size. The average adult needs 45 to 60 grams of high-quality protein every day so your protein for one day may include:
  - 3 ounces of chicken (21 grams)
  - 8 ounces of nonfat or low-fat milk (8 grams)
  - 1 cup cooked lentils (18 grams)
  - 1 ounce of nuts and seeds (4-12 grams) such as hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, dry roasted peanuts, almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds, flax seeds, sesame seeds, chia seeds, cashews, and more
  
- **Antioxidants.** Antioxidants prevent or slow damage to your cells caused by free radicals — unstable molecules your body produces as a reaction to environmental and other pressures. These foods, rich in antioxidants, produce known brain health benefits:
  - Almonds
  - Bell peppers (especially red and orange)
  - Blueberries
  - Dark green leafy vegetables
  - Strawberries
  - Tomatoes
  
- **Calcium and Vitamin D.** Calcium is critical for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis and vitamin D is essential for the absorption of calcium. Dairy foods are still the best source of calcium and it is easily absorbed. In addition to supporting your cardiovascular, immune and endocrine systems, studies have linked vitamin D to brain health suggesting vitamin D deficiency can impact cognitive function. Vitamin D is not widely found in foods except for fortified dairy products, but your body makes vitamin D from exposure to sunlight and you

are in Florida, so get out into the sunshine! If you aren't making enough vitamin D you may also need to take a supplement.

- **Water.** As you age, you may be more vulnerable to dehydration because your sense of thirst decreases. Water is necessary for almost all of your bodily functions and you need 48 to 64 ounces of fluid every day. Try to stay away from fluids that dehydrate you, like coffee, tea, soda, and alcohol. Stick to drinks that are not diuretics:
  - Water
  - Decaffeinated beverages
  - Nonfat or low-fat milk, almond milk, walnut milk, soy milk
  
- ***And don't forget to BE BRAIN HEALTHY.*** Adopt a lifestyle that includes 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 ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).