

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



An Attitude of Gratitude Amplifies Brain Health

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.

Gratitude encourages brain health and fights brain illness by amplifying the good in our lives, including the good in our relationships, in our coping abilities, in our thinking skills, and our overall health and well-being. Now that is something for which to be grateful.

Gratitude is the feeling of appreciation, gratefulness, or graciousness. To be grateful is to be aware of and thankful for the good things that happen. It involves taking time to recognize and express thanks, acknowledging receipt of something of value — a gift, a favor, a blessing — to feel thankful for it and then to be inclined to give kindness in return.

Gratitude Boosts Brain Health and Fights Brain Illness

It may sound simplistic, even corny, but the research clearly demonstrates that we would be happier, experience greater outcomes in health, well-being, and flourishing if we cultivated an attitude of gratitude.

- Grateful thinking promotes the savoring of positive life experiences.
- Expressing gratitude bolsters self-worth and self-esteem.
- Gratitude helps people cope with stress and trauma.
- The expression of gratitude encourages moral behavior.
- Gratitude can help build social bonds.
- Expressing gratitude tends to inhibit invidious comparisons with others.
- The practice of gratitude is incompatible with negative emotions.

Practicing Gratitude

From the research data, experiencing and expressing gratitude are some of the best strategies (right up there with physical activity) to enhance our brain health and fight brain illness through supporting our emotional well-being, managing negative thoughts, engaging in meaning-filled positive relationships, and eating brain healthy food.

It is important to note, however, that feeling grateful and expressing gratitude are distinct. To get the maximum brain health reward, we will want to *do both*. We can remind ourselves to feel grateful; we may have to learn and try out different ways of expressing it. The only impediment is the common tendency to take for granted the gifts and blessings that we receive.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

First, what do you have to be grateful for? It's so easy to take everything for granted. And having a Thanksgiving feast once a year is not going to be enough to increase your brain health and happiness.

For starters, how about being alive? You can breathe deeply. You have a mind for thinking and a body for doing. The sun freely gives you light, warmth, and the energy that makes your food. If you happen to watch the sunrise or the sunset, that might be a good occasion to feel grateful. Do you have a roof over your head? Food in the fridge? A smile to share?

Cultivate your gratitude:

- **Gratitude Meditation.** Gratitude meditation encourages you to ask yourself: "What did I receive? What did I give? What troubles and difficulties did I cause to others?" This brings your expectations and actuality more into awareness, which allows for further learning to appreciate blessings.
- **Gratitude Journal.** Gratitude journals can redirect your focus on negative or neutral life events to positive aspects of your life. Make a habit of writing down the things for which you're grateful. It doesn't have to be a long list, but if you regularly challenge yourself to identify and name your gratitude, you may notice improvement in your emotional well-being.
- **Gratitude Visit.** Expressing your gratitude may be particularly effective when done directly by phone, letter or face-to face to another person. [Watch this video](#) to experience the impact of a gratitude visit.
- **Experience Gratitude.** Listen to songs of [gratitude, appreciation and gracefulness](#) or watch films that teach gratitude such as *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995), *It Could Happen to You* (1994), or *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

- **Be Brain Healthy** and **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

By practicing both feeling and expressing gratitude you can change your perspective. “Gratitude is an attitude” may be a platitude, but it happens to be true. By becoming aware of what you have to be grateful for you will find more and more to be grateful for. You will become less pessimistic and more optimistic, learn to see glass as half full rather than half empty. This change in attitude and perspective supports brain health and fights brain illness, opening you up greater happiness, health, and well-being.

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 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 Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).

