

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### **Cognitive and Creative Stimulation 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.*

Cognitive reserve is an important aspect of brain health. You can think of cognitive reserve as your brain's ability to cope during life's unexpected events. Your brain does this by having available resources to rely on so it can continue to function well during challenging times. The more cognitive reserve you have, the more likely you can stave off symptoms of brain illness, including degenerative disease, like dementia. There are multiple brain healthy lifestyles that build brain and cognitive reserve over your lifetime, including learning, creativity, and curiosity.

The Brain Health Initiative recommends living a brain healthy lifestyle, including engaging in creative and cognitively stimulating projects. Think of cognitive stimulation as exercises that challenge your ability to think. Activities that stimulate cognitive thinking and creativity have been shown to increase brain health and fight brain illness, including reducing stress and helping to regulate emotions.

Stimulating your brain through various intellectual activities, such as practicing yoga or tai chi, gardening, writing a blog post or a poem, creating or trying out a new recipe, recording a song, learning a new language, or volunteering, provides benefits for brain health — no matter your age — and can impact how well your brain functions. In addition, fostering your own cognitive stimulation and creativity could even have a positive impact on others.

Significant evidence exists that suggests the more you stimulate and challenge your brain, and the earlier you begin that stimulation, the more you will increase your brain health, optimize its performance, and fight brain illness across the lifespan. Participating in new or mentally challenging activities promotes neuroplasticity and fosters the process of neurogenesis—the birth of new neurons in your brain.

Leading a brain healthy lifestyle (including engaging in intellectually and creatively stimulating activities), builds cognitive reserve and lowers your risk for brain illness such as dementia and depression.

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

The Brain Health Initiative's Dr. Shelley Carson, a lecturer in the department of psychology at Harvard University, recommends becoming an "expert" as a way to engage in cognitive stimulation, enhance your creative skills, and make brain performance boosting use of your time. She suggests you begin by picking a topic of interest and expanding your knowledge.

- Begin a computer file on your topic. Save articles, webpages of interest, photos. Take notes. Be thorough. Your investigation should include several sources.
- Use both Internet sources, popular press magazines and newspaper articles, as well as scholarly sources to learn about your chosen topic. You may consider contacting experts on your topic and talking to them directly.
- Choose a new topic about every two months. But continue to keep an eye out for new developments in your previously chosen topic areas and periodically update and review your topics of expertise.
- This exercise can be extended to include the whole family. Here are some resources to check out:
  - [Ideas Roadshow](#) offers an extensive collection of original, trusted content across many disciplines. All resources have been created with an aim to inspire individuals of all ages with an accessible glimpse into the world of top-level research.
  - Free online courses from Harvard University: Explore hundreds of free online courses from [Harvardx](#).
  - [Skype a Scientist](#) live sessions help children stay excited about learning — from ants and dinosaurs to the deep sea and the moon.
  - Explore this running [list of educational resources](#) and companies offering free subscriptions due to school closing.

**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 Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).