

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Couples and COVID-19: A New Kind of Togetherness

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.

COVID-19 has changed our primary relationships. Around the world, millions of couples who mostly led separate lives from 9-to-5 are suddenly safer-at-home. We are stuck together all day, every day, with no end in sight.

This newfound togetherness can increase brain health, or it can cause sky-high stress levels. According to Harvard colleague, McLean Hospital psychiatrist Jacqueline Olds, MD, the stressors caused by the COVID-19 crisis are compounded by the adjustments of forced togetherness.

“You might be worried if you’re going to make it economically, if you’re going to lose your savings, or how you’re going to take care of your children at home,” Dr. Olds said. “And you may take it out on the only person who is around—your partner.”

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Dr. Olds suggests that partners can effectively deal with the pressures brought on by the pandemic by practicing brain healthy communication and by being vigilant, open, and willing to ask for help.

- **Take Your Emotional Pulse:** There is a tendency to become more controlling when you are scared or angry, and that can become dangerous if there is only one other person around. People tend to become more controlling with your partner during times of distress, so it helps to stop and check your emotional pulse every so often. Try diffusing anger and stress by counting to ten. If you're about to say something unfair or nasty to your partner, count to ten and let it pass.
- **Find Some Separation:** That feeling of being confined can spur anger and frustration in the best of times, coronavirus has made this problem worse—and harder to deal with. To protect your brain health, take a break, and create some time and space between you and your partner. Find ways to physically or mentally create space. If you are working at home, work in separate rooms. Designate certain times during the day when you want to be alone.
- **Reach Out for Help:** The coronavirus pandemic is increasing risk of brain illness and causing stress, anxiety, and depression among individuals and couples who have never faced a mental health issue. Don't be ashamed to reach out for help. Almost overnight, mental health services have become available remotely. There are links to connect you with providers, and platforms for online counseling sessions — including virtual couples therapy.
- **Find the Silver Lining:** Promote your brain health and look for the positive in your situation. The couples who are thriving during the pandemic are the ones who are adept at finding the silver lining. Look at this as an opportunity to do more of the things you like do together or maybe experiment with new roles, such as taking over the cooking.

McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass, is the largest psychiatric teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School. [Read the full article.](#)

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](#).