

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Food for Mood, Thought, and for Staying Healthy- A Brain Healthy Shopping Guide

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.

Nutrition is a core brain health protective factor. It's easy to reach for edible comfort during challenging times, but many of those so-called comfort foods are less than ideal for your brain and physical health. Brain Health Initiative's nutrition advisor Dr. Uma Naidoo, Director of Nutritional & Lifestyle Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, offers nutritional advice to help keep you and your family cognitively, emotionally and physically healthy.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was seeing an increase of brain health issues, such as anxiety and depression. Dr. Naidoo recommends eating more fruits and vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, and healthy fats – such as olive oil and avocado – while cutting back on added sugars and refined foods. These foods bring a healthier balance of your gut bacteria, which is shown to help protect brain health, fight brain illness, and increase brain performance across the lifespan (including, decreasing anxiety, stress and depression).

If adopting brain healthy nutrition is new for you, make the transition to brain healthy eating gradually over weeks or months so your new eating style becomes a habit and not a fad. Brain healthy meals are based on fruits, vegetables, whole grains (whole wheat bread, brown rice, quinoa and bulgur), healthy oils (like olive), beans, nuts, legumes (lentils, dried peas and beans), seeds, herbs and spices.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Brain Healthy Shopping Guide

When shopping, Dr. Naidoo recommends filling the cart with healthy options first. Here is a brain healthy shopping list and some helpful tips:

- Browse around the outer ring of the store first where fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats, poultry are located.
- Consider sweet potatoes over regular potatoes as they are a more complex carb and take longer to digest. You can even make oven fries with these.
- Try roasting spaghetti squash to create a pasta alternative.
- Reach for organic canned beans (black beans, red kidney beans, cannellini, butter beans, navy beans) or the dry versions if you know how to pressure cook them.
- Frozen vegetables (preferably certified organic) with no added salt or sugar are super easy, healthy and quick to make.
- Opt for fish, chicken or turkey, instead of beef.
- Frozen fruits (preferably certified organic), without added syrup are another great option if you have the freezer space.
- Select whole grain bread, brown rice, quinoa and bulgur instead of refined rice and pasta.
- Instead of choosing chips and dip, try celery, carrot or pepper strips and salsa or hummus.

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](#).