BRAIN HEALTH BOOST

Brain Health Matters and Too Much or Too Little Sleep Makes a Difference

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. Today, the BHI is talking about how too little — and too much — sleep can affect your brain health.

Sleep is a brain health protective factor and not getting enough good quality sleep can put you at greater risk for brain illness. The science demonstrates that sleep is a good thing for your brain. Sleep keeps the brain functioning properly, helping you concentrate, think clearly, and process information and memories efficiently. Sleep deficiency increases your risk for a wide range of health problems including obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke. A lack of sleep can also weaken your immunity and impact your mood, cognitive performance, memory, and even our safety.

Many of us are experiencing sleep disturbances this week due to the recent time change. While we may have gained an extra hour, getting the right amount of sleep is important to our brain health. Sleep gives our brains the chance to "clean up" after a day of thinking and processing. It washes away excess toxins and amyloid-beta peptide. The amyloid protein is important to neural growth and repair, but a build-up of amyloid plaques can be a signal for Alzheimer's disease. It is clear, sleep is essential to brain health and for optimal daily performance.

We know that not getting enough sleep can leave us feeling foggy, but too much sleep can also make us feel like a leftover Halloween zombie. Studies show we need seven to eight hours of sleep every night. People who get enough sleep perform better on cognitive tests than those who sleep less—and those who sleep more. Too little sleep is usually defined as four hours or less per night, and too much is considered 10 hours or more. While the association between sleep and cognition remains unclear and more research is needed, *JAMA Network Open*, recently shared the results of a new study that links the right amount of sleep with optimal brain function.

When we don't get enough sleep, we may wake up feeling grumpy and unable to think clearly. The effects of sleeping too much are surprisingly similar: we may wake up with a headache or back pain, unable to think clearly. Getting too much sleep on a regular basis can also put us at higher risk for brain and physical health issues.

While the studies don't prove that too much or too little sleep cause a *decline* in brain function, they certainly show the two are connected when it comes to performance. Sleep is good for us, but just like everything in life: too much—or too little—of a good thing is not healthy.

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

Getting enough sleep doesn't mean sleeping longer. Try building habits that help you go to sleep faster and stay asleep longer. Here are some tips to help you get better, quality sleep.

- **Preparation.** Poor pre-bed habits can lead to difficulty sleeping. Give yourself time to wind down from the day before going to bed. Turn off electronics and lower the lights to help your brain realize it is time to sleep.
- **Environment.** Your bed and bedroom should be comfortable. Invest in a quality mattress, pillows and bedding. Keep your bedroom cool, quiet and free of distractions. Light can also prevent you from getting a good night's sleep so make sure the room is dark and the lights from electronics are dimmed or covered.
- **Timing.** Maintain a regular sleep-and-wake schedule. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day — even weekends. And if you're a napper, be careful. Taking a nap late in the day or for too long can interrupt your sleep schedule.
- **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

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.**