

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Laughter Is Brain Healthy-And That Is No Joke

*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.*

Humor promotes brain health and fights brain illness. Research has shown that finding something funny causes a cascade of biological changes in the brain and body. Studies reveal that good, hearty laughter can relieve tension and stress, boost the immune system, and help reduce the risk of heart attack and brain illness.

For the past 40 years, researchers have been able to demonstrate that laughter increases our ability to cope with difficulties. It helps us to connect with others and improves our mood. Humor triggers the brain's emotional and reward centers spurring the release of dopamine, helping the brain to process emotional responses, and enhancing our experience of pleasure. The experience of laughter and humor:

- Increases the production of serotonin, lifting our mood.
- Produced endorphins, regulating our pain and stress and increasing experiences of joy.
- Reduces stress hormones, increasing immune activity.
- Improves blood flow and blood vessel function in the brain, reducing the risk of stroke.
- Triggers abdominal contractions, stimulating circulation and the muscle tension.

Laughter is contagious so when we laugh it helps boost the brain health of those around us. Research suggests that mirror neurons, linked to empathic behavior, are often involved in laughter. Mirror neurons fire both when we perform an action and when we observe that same actions performed by others. That is one of the reasons television sitcoms use a laugh track to inspire audience engagement.

While research shows that experiencing and expressing may be able to improve cognitive and emotional health, just the mental and emotional experience of finding something funny can boost your mood. The next time you hear a joke or find something funny, whether you get it or not, let yourself go and enjoy a good, hearty laugh. It's good for you and your brain!

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

Your sense of humor gives your brain an opportunity to rest and find relief from stressful experiences. Try some of these strategies to stimulate your funny bone:

- **Give and receive.** Smile, even if you're just making the shape with your mouth. It can lead to happy feelings. Share your smile and laughter with others authentically, compassionately and frequently.
- **Set a daily intention** to look for humor and when you see it, share it.
- **Make playful behavior a part of the fabric of your life.**
- **What makes you laugh?** Create a brain healthy bank account and collect, save and withdraw items that you find humorous, that make you giggle or that spark a memory of a funny experience. Place them in a box, jar or basket. Pull them out consistently once a day, and anytime you need a dose of humor.
- **Reframe**, try looking at a certain situation in a new positive, humorous and more productive way.
- **Laugh generously.** Practice laughing.
- **Embrace the ridiculousness.**
- **Have funny friends.** Find your people, those friends who will make you laugh and laugh with you, and spend time connecting and sharing.
- **Watch funny shows and movies, or read funny books.**
- **Go to a virtual comedy club.**
- [McCurdy's Comedy Theatre and Humor Institute](#) is a top choice to cultivate and experience the Art of Stand-Up-Comedy in the region.
- **Try Laughter Yoga**, an exercise routine that combines laughter exercises with yogic breathing which brings in more oxygen to the body and brain.
- If you are interested, **participate in a [BHI Humor Mindset questionnaire](#).**
- **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](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](#).