

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### **Celebrating Brain Awareness 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 preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today we are celebrating Brain Awareness Week, March 15-21.***

March 15 through 21 is a big week for us at The Brain Health Initiative — this is **Brain Awareness Week**. Brain Awareness Week is the global campaign to foster public enthusiasm and support for brain science that will increase brain health outcomes: the reason that the BHI was created.

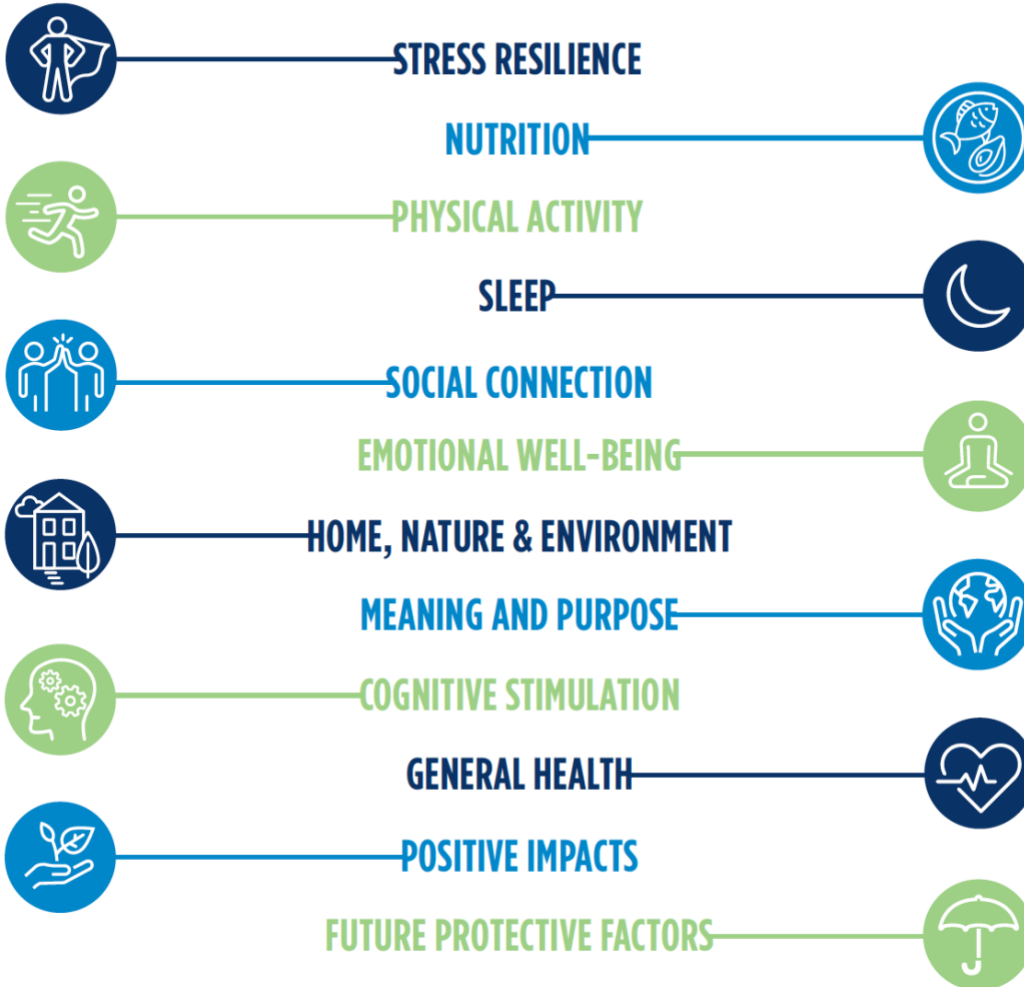
A healthy and optimally performing brain is **about all of us** across our lifespan and is essential for living a long, healthy, and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, at least one out of three of us will be affected by brain illness during our lifetime. Improving brain health and optimizing performance across the lifespan, and reducing risk factors for brain illness and cognitive decline, may be the most important health priority of the century. BHI efforts are on creating lifelong change at the local, national, and global level.

The BHI focuses on 12 pillars, protective brain health factors, for raising brain awareness and promoting a brain healthy lifestyle. Each of these pillars is important for improved brain health and optimizing brain performance across the ages. At the individual and community level, improved brain health can lead to increases in all life domains and in public health and societal outcomes:

- Improved physical health and well-being and reduced burden of care, including medical costs.
- Lower rates of depression and anxiety disorders leading to reduced loss of productivity.
- Increase in creativity, innovation, and satisfaction among the work force.
- Better school attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates, and lower dropout rates.
- Increase in youth and adolescent mental health and decrease in teen suicide.
- Increase in relationship satisfaction.
- Decreased prevalence of costly social problems, including crime and drug and alcohol misuse.

- Decreased overall stress levels.
- Decreased senior health care costs due to decrease in age-related cognitive decline.

## Brain Healthy Lifestyle Makes a Difference



Each of these pillars is important to our overall brain health.



**General health.** Caring for our mind, body and soul leads to healthier behaviors, better quality of life, and higher life satisfaction.



**Stress resilience.** We all experience stress, but not all stress is bad. With the right set of resilience tools, we can use stress to fuel positive change that makes us stronger.



**Nutrition.** Our brains have some very specific nutritional needs. They require a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and healthy fats, or what is often referred to as a Mediterranean diet. Luckily, these same nutrients are also good for our physical well-being.



**Physical activity.** Exercise is a key component of brain health, improving blood flow to and within the brain and supplying the oxygen and nutrients needed for optimal performance. Exercise improves our attention, memory, and cognitive control, can aid in the treatment of ADHD, is linked to higher intelligence and for the aging brain, physical activity can restore aspects of brain structure and function that deteriorate with aging.



**Sleep.** Sleep is a primary biological need — something we can't live without. Every day, billions of brain cells allow us to make decisions, process information and remember it later. Sleep deprivation slows that work down, compromising our mental performance and disrupting our hormone levels that affect thought, mood, and energy.



**Social connection.** Social connection and engagement protect us from illnesses such as depression and dementia. Having social support also protects against inflammation in the brain and body, which is associated with arthritis, Alzheimer's disease and depression. Our social connections have also been shown to reduce the body's response to stress and can bolster our immune system.



**Emotional well-being.** When we are experiencing health, happiness, and prosperity we are in a state of good brain health with high life satisfaction. We have a sense of meaning or purpose and the ability to manage stress. No matter our age, positive emotions can protect our brain health, increase daily brain performance, and fight brain illnesses such as dementia, depression and anxiety. Positive emotions can also protect our overall physical health and wellbeing.



**Home, nature and environment.** The right environment can lighten our mood and bring a sense of calm. Further, avoiding toxins in our environments are imperative to maintaining brain health and optimizing performance. Getting out into nature has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety.



**Meaning and purpose.** A strong sense of purpose has been shown to lower the likelihood of brain tissue damage that boosts our risk for developing dementia, movement problems, disability, and death — the classic characteristics of old age. The meaning of our life is within us, it's just a matter of recognizing it.



**Cognitive stimulation.** Stimulating our brains through various intellectual activities provides benefits for brain health and can impact how well our brain functions. Evidence suggests the more we stimulate and challenge our brain the more we increase our brain health, optimize brain performance, and fight brain illness across our lifespan.



**Positive impacts.** Positive emotions are linked with better brain health, better physical health, longer life, and a greater sense of well-being.



**Future protective factors.** Our brains change with age, but there are ways we can protect our brains from decline. Strategies exist to protect our brain from before we are born to prevent mental decline as we age.

The brain health choices we make today can change our lives for the better. The BHI is committed to exploring the complex science behind our lifestyle choices; to identifying brain risk and protective factors; and to empowering our communities through education and innovative solutions that encourage all of us to take control of our brain health and improve our quality of life across the lifespan.

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

The best way to promote and protect your brain health and prevent brain illness is to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY** and adopt a lifestyle that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses and language that promote the pillars.

- **Stress resilience.**
  - Be curious.
  - Try to unwind. Breathe. Let go.
  - Take time to recharge.
  - Exercise.
  - Prioritize self-care.
- **Nutrition.**
  - Reduce your intake of unhealthy foods that are high in saturated fat, refined carbohydrates and processed food products.
  - Avoid foods and beverages with a high sugar content.
  - Increase your intake of nutrient-rich foods such as vegetables, leafy greens, fruits, fish, whole grains and nuts.
  - Keep hydrated, drinking six to eight glasses of water daily.
  - Strictly limit fast food.
  - Limit alcohol and if you do drink substitute nutrient-rich red wine for distilled spirits.
- **Physical activity.**
  - Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity, aerobic physical activity a week, plus at least two days of strength training.
  - Choose physical activities that you enjoy doing and stay with them.
  - Schedule your physical activity.
  - Combine physical activity with other brain health activities.
  - Try mind-body exercise to improve physical and mental health and boost your mood.
  - Break your activities up into small segments throughout the day.
- **Sleep.**
  - Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. If you can't give them up, try avoiding them before bedtime.
  - Regular aerobic activity helps you fall asleep faster, spend more time in deep sleep, and awaken less often during the night.
  - Maintain a regular sleep-and-wake schedule, using the bedroom only for

- sleeping or sex, and keep the bedroom dark and free of distractions.
- Relaxation techniques such as meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation can counter anxiety and racing thoughts.
- Cognitive behavioral techniques can help with insomnia.
- **Social connection.**
  - Schedule time with others so that it gets the priority it deserves.
  - Combine social engagement with other important brain health activities such as taking daily walks with your neighbors or joining a Book Club to enhance cognitive stimulation.
  - Meet new people. Try joining an organization based on a hobby or a sports team, getting involved in local politics or volunteer at a local organization.
  - Help others who may have become socially isolated engage socially by including them in social activities and introducing them to others with common interests.
- **Emotional wellbeing.**
  - Practice gratitude.
  - Recognize three good things each day for one week.
  - Spend more time living mindfully.
  - Practice mindfulness meditation.
  - Perform random acts of kindness.
- **Home, nature and environment.**
  - Take a walk.
  - Go bird watching.
  - Go to the beach.
  - Stop and smell the roses.
- **Meaning and purpose.**
  - Find your passion.
  - Find your connections.
  - Find your sense of belonging.
  - Find your mood.
  - Find your environment.
- **Cognitive stimulation and creativity.**
  - Practice yoga or tai chi.
  - Write. Try a blog post or a poem, or journaling.
  - Try out a new recipe or create your own.
  - Sing and dance.
  - Paint or draw.
  - Learn a new language.
  - Volunteer.
  - Garden.
  - Take a walk.
- **General health.**
  - Eat healthy.
  - Get plenty of sleep.
  - Exercise.

- Manage stress.
- Count your blessings.
- Live an attitude of gratitude.
- Learn about spirituality.
- Practice patience.
- **Positive impacts**
  - Seek pleasurable emotions and sensations.
  - Pursue goals and activities in which you can fully engage.
  - Do good things.
  - Express appreciation for what you have.
  - Live in the moment as it unfolds.
  - Nurture yourself.
- **Future protective factors.**
  - Support interactive relationships with your child.
  - Provide a safe environment.
  - Reduce sources of stress.
  - Strengthen your basic life skills.
  - Practice all of the suggested tactics for promoting brain health and preventing brain illness across your lifespan.

**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 **Be Brain Healthy** movement, **because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference**. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).