

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



“Springing Ahead” 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. **Daylight saving time begins March 14, so before we “spring forward” we are looking at the important role of sleep when it comes to brain health.***

Sleep is essential for achieving an optimal quality of life and improving our health. When we were young, we fought sleep. As youngsters we didn’t want to take naps. As teenagers we negotiated for later bedtimes. Now as adults, many of us would give anything for a good night’s sleep and after we move our clocks forward an hour this weekend means our sleep schedule is going to be disrupted even more as we adjust.

Research shows that many of us are sleeping less than six hours a night, and more than 75 percent of us experience difficulty sleeping. Having trouble falling asleep now and again is not a big concern, but chronic sleep loss can contribute to physical health problems such as weight gain, high blood pressure, and a decrease in immunity, as well as brain health and performance problems such as depression, ADHD, anxiety and dementia.

Under normal circumstances, we should be able to adjust to the time change in just a few days, but when we are already sleep deprived that one hour change can really throw us off. When we don't get enough sleep our ability to focus and concentrate declines and our reaction time is slower. Studies show that on the Monday after daylight saving time begins there’s about a 10 percent increase in car accidents. In fact, research suggests going without sleep for 48 hours impairs cognitive abilities to the same degree as having a blood alcohol concentration above the legal limit for driving.

The [Harvard Women's Health Watch](#) suggests six reasons to get enough sleep:

1. **Learning and memory:** Sleep helps the brain commit new information to memory.
2. **Metabolism and weight:** Chronic sleep deprivation can affect the way our bodies process and store carbohydrates and alters the hormone levels that affect our appetite.
3. **Safety:** Lack of sleep leads to a greater risk of falling, making errors and causing accidents.

4. **Mood:** When we're tired we can be irritable, impatient, unable to concentrate, and moody.
5. **Cardiovascular health:** Sleep disorders are linked to higher risk of hypertension, increased stress hormone levels, and irregular heartbeat.
6. **Disease:** Lack of sleep reduce our body's immunity.

The good news is that there are ways to make sure we get the sleep we need. It is hard to make up for lost sleep, but by taking steps to make sure we get seven to eight hours of sleep each night we can restore our focus and clarity.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

There are plenty of things you can do to make sure you get enough sleep. Here are some tips from the BHI and [Harvard Health](#) to help you sleep your way to optimal performance.

- **Check for underlying causes.** If you don't seem to be getting enough sleep, there may be a medical reason for it. Some conditions and medications can interfere with your sleep patterns and the solution may be as simple as getting treatment or adjusting your medication to restore better sleep.
- **Practice good sleep hygiene.** Create the right environment for healthy sleep. Use your bed for sleep and sex only. Keep your bedroom as dark and quiet as possible. Keep a regular sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. If you haven't fallen asleep within 20 minutes after going to bed, get up and go back to bed when you feel ready to sleep.
- **Take a nap.** If you don't get enough sleep at night and are sleepy during the day, a short nap can help. It's best to take one short midday nap as napping late in the day can interfere with sleep later. If you have difficulty getting to sleep at night, then avoid napping to help increase your sleep drive at bedtime.
- **Exercise earlier, not later.** Exercise stimulates the brain, so make sure you finish your workout at least three hours before turning in.
- **Watch your diet.** Avoid foods that promote heartburn, and don't eat late at night; lying down after eating promotes sleep-disturbing heartburn. Ban caffeine-packed food and drinks (chocolate, tea, coffee, soda) at least six hours before bedtime. Avoid alcohol for at least two hours before bed. It may make you feel sleepy at first, but several hours later it acts like a stimulant—and interrupts sleep. And don't drink too much water before bedtime, to cut down on trips to the bathroom in the middle of the night.
- **See a sleep specialist.** If your own efforts aren't working, you'll want the help of a sleep professional to both diagnose your problem and propose behavioral therapy and possibly drug treatments.
- **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 ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).