



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Thinking FAST 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. **March 15-21 is Brain Awareness Week and today we talk about the importance of recognizing the signs of stroke***

We all know the warning signs for a heart attack, but we may not be as familiar with signs of a “brain attack,” or stroke. A stroke can present with a wide range of symptoms that may affect our ability to speak, see, move, or feel and prompt treatment can prevent a potentially devastating disability or death.

A stroke interrupts blood flow to the brain, depriving our brain cells of oxygen and nutrients. There are two major types of stroke: ischemic and hemorrhagic. Ischemic strokes, which account for more than 80 percent of the strokes that occur, are the result of a blood clot blocking the blood supply to the brain. Transient ischemic attacks — often referred to as TIAs or ministrokes — are a type of ischemic stroke, although the obstruction is temporary. Hemorrhagic strokes are caused by a bursting blood vessel in the brain.

While the mortality rate from strokes has been declining, the number of people having them seems to be rising. That’s why it is so important to recognize the early warning signs of a stroke. Luckily, the easiest way to recognize the signs of a stroke are to the think F-A-S-T.

SPOT A STROKE™

F.A.S.T.



FACE Drooping



ARM Weakness



SPEECH Difficulty



TIME to Call 911

Learn more at stroke.org

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People who have had a stroke may regain some function on their own, but recovery requires early and ongoing rehabilitation. Aggressive stroke rehabilitation started as soon as possible can mean the difference between recovering skills essential for daily living and remaining severely impaired, but someone recovering from a stroke may continue to see improvement months, and even years, after their stroke.

We are lucky here on the Suncoast when it comes to quick treatment for a stroke. All of our hospitals have excellent stroke treatment and rehabilitation programs.

[Lakewood Ranch Medical Center's](#) Stroke and Cerebrovascular Centers offer a rapid-response Stroke Alert Team to evaluate and treat all stroke emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Sarasota Memorial Hospital](#) has the only nationally recognized, state-certified Comprehensive Stroke Center in Sarasota County with wide range of specialists and the latest treatment options for people who suffer complex strokes, severe deficits or multiple organ challenges and one-of-a-kind stroke rehabilitation.

[Blake Medical Center](#) has the first and only certified Comprehensive Stroke Center in Manatee County, with the ability to diagnose and treat stroke patients who require intensive medical and surgical care, specialized tests, or interventional therapies.

[Doctor's Hospital of Sarasota](#) maintains a Primary Stroke Center designation with The Joint Commission and follows the highest national standards for safety and care in the rapid response and treatment of stroke patients.

[Manatee Memorial Hospital's](#) Stroke and Cerebrovascular Centers also has a rapid-response Stroke Alert Team and stroke patients receive specially designed services and treatments which focus on prevention and intervention, as well as rehabilitation and education.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The best way to treat a stroke may be to prevent it from happening. The BHI and [Harvard Health](#) suggest these eight ways to reduce your risk of stroke.

- 1. Lower your blood pressure.** High blood pressure can double your stroke risk if it is not controlled and is the biggest contributor to the risk of stroke in both men and women. Ideal blood pressure is 120/80. Monitoring your blood pressure and getting treatment if it is elevated may be the biggest difference you can make to your vascular health.
 - Reduce the salt in your diet, ideally to no more than 1,500 milligrams a day (about a half teaspoon).
 - Increase polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats in your diet, while avoiding foods high in saturated fats.
 - Eat 4 to 5 cups of fruits and vegetables every day, one serving of fish two to three times a week, and several daily servings of whole grains and low-fat dairy.
 - Get more exercise — at least 30 minutes of activity a day, and more, if possible.
 - Quit smoking, if you smoke.
 - If needed, take blood pressure medicines.
- 2. Lose weight.** Obesity and its complications (high blood pressure and diabetes) raises your odds of having a stroke. Losing just 10 pounds can have a real impact on reducing your stroke risk. Work with your doctor to create a weight loss strategy that works for you.
 - Try to limit your calorie intake to 1,500 to 2,000 calories a day, depending on your activity level and your current weight.
 - Get out and exercise. Activities like walking, golfing, or playing tennis are a great way to get moving.
- 3. Exercise.** Exercise helps you lose weight and lower your blood pressure like we mentioned above, but it also stands on its own as a way to reduce your risk of stroke. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least five days a week.
 - Take a walk around your neighborhood every morning after breakfast.
 - Try to reach the level at which you're breathing hard, but you can still talk while exercising.
 - Take the stairs instead of an elevator when you can and try parking further away and walk to the building.

- If you don't have 30 minutes to exercise, break your exercise up several 10- to 15-minute sessions during the day.
 - Find a buddy — exercising can be more fun with a friend.
- 4. Drink alcohol in moderation.** Drinking a little alcohol is okay and may actually decrease your risk of stroke. More than two drinks per day, though, and your risk goes up very sharply.
- Limit yourself to one glass of alcohol a day.
 - Make red wine your drink of choice. It contains resveratrol, which is thought to protect the heart and brain.
 - Watch the pour. A standard-sized drink should be a 5-ounce glass of wine, 12-ounces beer, or 1.5-ounces of hard liquor.
- 5. Treat your a-fib.** Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heartbeat that may cause clots to form in the heart and travel to the brain, producing a stroke. A-fib puts you at a five-times higher risk of stroke.
- If you experience symptoms such as heart palpitations or shortness of breath, see your doctor.
 - If you have a-fib, you may need to take a blood thinner to reduce your stroke risk. Your doctors can guide you through this treatment.
- 6. Treat your diabetes.** Diabetes damages your blood vessels over time, making it more likely for clots to form.
- Get your blood sugar levels checked regularly.
 - If you're diabetic, monitor your blood sugar as directed by your doctor.
 - Use diet, exercise, and medicines to keep your blood sugar within the recommended range.
- 7. Quit smoking.** Smoking thickens your blood, and it increases the amount of plaque buildup in the arteries — both of which can lead to increased risk of clots. A healthy diet, regular exercise and quitting smoking are the three most powerful lifestyle changes you can make to help you reduce your stroke risk.
- Ask your doctor for advice on the most appropriate way for you to quit.
 - Use quit-smoking aids, such as nicotine pills or patches, counseling, or medicine.
 - Don't give up. Most smokers need several tries to quit. See each attempt as bringing you one step closer to successfully beating the habit.
- 8. 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](#).