

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### **A Healthy Home 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. **In celebration of Earth Day on April 22 we talk about ways to protect your home environment while promoting brain health and decreasing risk for brain illness. The BHI is committed to increasing brain health protective factors and promoting the health of our environments is a key pillar in this process.***

For many of us, home is our safe place. It's where we escape the pressures of work and school, and when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, our homes became a refuge from the outside world. But is our home as safe as we think? Are we doing all we can to protect our home environment while promoting brain health and preventing brain illness?

Researchers at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard have been looking at ways to make our homes healthier place to lives. The resulting [Homes for Health Report](#) examined everything we do in our homes: our cleaning practices, cooking, use of personal care products, lawn care, even what we bring into our homes on the bottoms of our shoes.

In the [Harvard Gazette](#), the director of the School's Healthy Buildings program and one of the report's lead authors, Joe Allen, said: "The home influences heart health, brain health, hormone health, mental health, all these factors. We know what a healthy meal looks like. We know that exercise is good for you and that pollution is bad for you. But we know a lot less about the places where we spend all of our time."

We spend up to 65 percent of our time in our homes, so the health of our house is important. The report provides 36 room-by-room tips for making our home environment a healthy one. Luckily, most of the tips are easy to implement and offer immediate improvement for our physical and brain health— and our home's — well-being. They include things like limiting the use of air fresheners, using the exhaust fan while cooking, and leaving shoes at the door. The report also recommends having our homes checked for radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer. In Florida, one in five homes has elevated radon levels.

We are all spending more time at home these days. It makes sense to protect our indoor environment in the same ways that we are protecting our outdoor environment.

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

In addition to the 36 room-by-room suggestions for improving the health of your home, the Homes for Health Report and the BHI recommend these expert tips for improving the environment of your entire home.

- **Leave your shoes at the door.** Anything you step on — or in — comes into your home on your shoes. Having family members and friends remove their shoes at the door not only reduces the dirt and dust that gets tracked into your house, it also prevents the spread of oils, pesticides and other chemicals that may be harmful to you and your pets.
- **Let the fresh air in.** Here in Florida your air conditioner runs all year, so you don't open the windows. But the report shows the concentrations of air pollutants are often as much as five times higher indoors than outside. Ventilating your home as much as possible, especially when the outdoor air is clean and cool, can help clear indoor pollutants and even relieve headaches and eye irritation.
- **Install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors and be sure they are working.** Test your detectors regularly to be sure they're working and change the batteries when you change your clocks for daylight saving time.
- **Let there be light.** Exposure to natural sunlight, and darkness, is important to your natural circadian rhythm. Natural light promotes healthy sleep and improves your overall sense of well-being, so open the blinds and let the sun shine in!
- **Get the lead out.** If your home was built before 1980 there is a good chance lead paint may have been used in its construction. Lead is one of the most potent neurological toxins known and exposure to it can have lifelong brain performance impact on IQ, learning, and behavior. Removing it is especially important in homes with young children and moms-to-be. Inexpensive tests are available to determine the presence of lead.
- **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 ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).