

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Poetry and Creativity Can Stimulate Brain Performance

*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. **During National Poetry Month, we take a look at how poetry and creativity can stimulate brain performance and reduce the risk of brain illness.***

When we hear the word “poetry,” many of us think of tedious high school or college classes in which we had to dissect the structure and symbolism of each stanza. But poetry is all around us: from the books of Dr. Seuss to the lyrics of our favorite songs. And it stimulates our brain’s health and performance.

Cognitive stimulation in the form of creativity is exercise for our brain. Activities that stimulate cognitive thinking and creativity have been shown to increase brain health and fight brain illness, including reducing stress and helping to regulate emotions. Stimulating your brain health and performance through various intellectual activities provides benefits for brain health and can impact how well the brain functions.

Research shows that participating in mentally challenging activities that encourage creative thinking promotes neuroplasticity (changes in the brain) and fosters the process of neurogenesis—the birth of new neurons in the brain. When we read poetry we are exercising our language and interpretive skills. One study asked participants to read works from Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and other well-known poets in both their original form and a version that had been rewritten for clarity. The more complicated versions of the poems created more dramatic responses in the brain’s language center.

Reading poetry stimulates the areas of the brain activated by sitting and relaxing: the same network of brain regions linked to introspection. Researchers have used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to track brain activation while participants read poetry and found that reading poetry activated the areas of the brain linked to reading, as well as those areas of emotional response activated by listening to music.

Significant evidence suggests the more we stimulate and challenge our brains, and the earlier we begin that stimulation, the more we can increase our brain health, optimize its performance, and fight brain illness across the lifespan.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

If you think poetry isn't "your thing," remember poetry is all around you in the lyrics of songs, greeting card messages, and the books you read to your children and grandchildren. Here are some suggestions for bringing more poetry into your life.

- Watch Amanda Gordon, the country's first-ever youth poet laureate, move a nation with her poem [The Hill We Climb](#).
- Have your family pick a book of poems and take turns reading aloud from it once a week.
- Search for online poetry classes. [State College of Florida](#), [New College of Florida](#), and Sarasota [Adult and Community Enrichment](#) all offer poetry courses.
- Attend a live or virtual poetry reading or workshop. Sarasota's [Bookstore1](#) offers online poetry readings and workshops and the Ringling College of Art and Design's [Visiting Writer's Forum](#) is free and open to the public.
- Visit [Poets.org](#) for a new poem every day.
- And don't forget to **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](#).