

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Risks and Benefits of Drinking as You Age

*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. **April is Alcohol Awareness Month and we take a look at alcohol use as we age and implications to protecting brain health and preventing brain illness.***

Like many things in life, there is no clear answer on the good versus bad debate when it comes to drinking alcohol. An [article](#) from the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard may have said it best: “It’s safe to say that alcohol is both a tonic and a poison. The difference lies mostly in the dose.”

Many studies point to the moderate alcohol intake as having positive physical and brain health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke, diabetes, and helping to ease stress. Moderate drinking is generally considered to be one drink or less per day for women or two drinks or less per day for men. Excessive drinking, on the other hand, is linked to many physical and brain health risks including liver disease, cardiovascular disease, cancer, depression, anxiety, and addiction.

But as we age our ability to metabolize alcohol declines adding greater risk to even moderate alcohol consumption. Studies show that after drinking the same amount of alcohol, older people have higher blood alcohol concentrations than younger people.

In addition, age-related changes in our vision, hearing, balance, and reflexes may be amplified by alcohol. This puts us at higher risk for alcohol-related falls and accidents. And because our bones are not as strong, we may experience broken bones and even more serious injuries from a fall. Many older adults also take prescription and over-the-counter medications that can be dangerous, and even fatal, when mixed with alcohol.

This doesn’t mean we need to give up our glass of wine or champagne with dinner or having a beer while watching the game. But as we age, we need to remember that having a couple of drinks may have a much bigger impact.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

It's important to balance the benefits and risks of drinking alcohol at any age. The [T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard](#) and the BHI offer these tips for alcohol use as you age.

- If you already drink alcohol or plan to begin, keep it moderate—no more than two drinks a day for men or one drink a day for women.
- If you are a man over 60, a drink a day may offer protection against heart disease.
- If you are woman over 60, a drink a day may protect against heart disease, but it can lead to an increased risk of multiple physical and brain illnesses.
- If you don't drink, there's no need to start. You can get the same health protections for cardiovascular health and brain health from physical activity and healthier eating.
- **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](#).