

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Annual Checkups for Brain and Body Health Make a Difference

*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 Women’s Health Week, we are talking about the importance of regular brain and body health checkups for women.***

This week we are celebrating women. Mother’s Day marks the start of National Women’s Health Week and May 10 is National Women’s Checkup Day. Routine health checkups provide an opportunity to catch problems before they become unmanageable. For women, an annual well-woman visit is a chance to speak with a physician about risk factors, early signs, symptoms and concerns for both brain and body health.

Women have many unique health concerns. Menstrual cycles, pregnancy, birth control, and menopause are just the beginning. Many diseases affect women differently than they do men and should be treated differently. Women are also nearly twice as likely to develop brain illnesses, such as dementia, depression, and anxiety. More women also tend to fill the role of caregiver in their family. During a well-woman visit, women should share information about their health habits and family history, and their health goals, as well as any concerns. Talking about family, work, activities, stresses, and joys — helps women collaborate on health care decisions.

In recent years, some health organizations have questioned the need for annual physicals, but as an article from [Harvard Women’s Health Watch](#) pointed out, there are benefits to an annual wellness exam. Regular checkups help our doctors understand who we are and provide a better perspective for interpreting our symptoms and making a diagnosis when things are “off.” Someone young and healthy may only need to see their doctor every two or three years, but for anyone over the age of 50 an annual well-woman check is still a good idea.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The Brain Health Initiative advocates a preventive approach to brain health and brain illness. We are working to develop a brain health continuum of care prototype in the primary care setting that screens for brain health risk factors and brain illness signs and symptoms across the lifespan, beginning before birth and through end of life. For women between the ages of 40 and 64, the [National Institutes of Health](#) recommends these regular screenings.

ANNUAL PHYSICAL EXAM. Including blood pressure check, cholesterol check, height, weight, and body mass index (BMI). Your doctor should also ask you about:

- Stress levels, depression and anxiety
- Diet and exercise
- Alcohol and tobacco use
- Safety issues, such as using seat belts and smoke detectors

BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING. Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions, you may need to have your blood pressure checked more often.

BREAST CANCER SCREENING. If you are between the ages of 40 and 49, ask your doctor about having a mammogram. If you are between the ages of 50 and 75 you should have a mammogram annually or every two years, depending on your risk factors. If your mother or sister had breast cancer at a younger age, you should consider yearly mammograms beginning earlier than the age at which they were diagnosed. If you have other risk factors for breast cancer, your provider may recommend a mammogram, breast ultrasound, or MRI scan.

CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING. Cervical cancer screening should start at age 21. If you are between the ages of 30 and 65 you should be screened with either a Pap test every three years, or the HPV test every five years. If you are older than 65 you can stop having Pap tests as long as you have had three normal tests within the past 10 years. If you have been treated for pre-cancer (cervical dysplasia) you should continue to have Pap tests for 20 years after treatment or until age 65, whichever is longer.

CHOLESTEROL SCREENING. If you have no known risk factors for heart disease it is recommended you begin cholesterol screening at age 45 and continue every five years. Changes in lifestyle, including weight gain, or being diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions, require screening more often.

COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING. Beginning at age 50 you should be screened for colorectal cancer. If you have inflammatory bowel disease or a family history of colon cancer, talk to your doctor about being screened before age 50.

DENTAL EXAM. See your dentist every six to 12 months for an oral exam and cleaning.

DIABETES SCREENING. Screening every three years should begin at age 44 —earlier and more frequently if you are overweight, have high blood pressure or other risk factors.

EYE EXAM. Even if you don't have vision problems, you should have eye exams every two to four years beginning at age 40, and every one to three years beginning at age 55. Your doctor may recommend more frequent checks if you have vision problems or are at risk for glaucoma. If you have diabetes, you should have an annual eye checkup.

IMMUNIZATIONS. Get a flu shot every year and ask your doctor about vaccines for shingles after age 50 and pneumonia after the age of 65. Tetanus-diphtheria and pertussis boosters are recommended every 10 years. And if you haven't gotten it yet, COVID-19 vaccines are readily available at pharmacies throughout the area.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE SCREENING. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening for hepatitis C and, depending on your lifestyle and medical history, you may need to be screened for sexually transmitted infections.

LUNG CANCER SCREENING. You should be screened annually with low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) if you are over age 55 with a history of smoking, if you currently smoke or if you have quit within the past 15 years.

OSTEOPOROSIS SCREENING. If you are over 50 or have risk factors for developing osteoporosis you should have a bone density test or DEXA scan.

SKIN EXAM. May is also Skin Cancer Awareness month so now is a great time to schedule an appointment with your dermatologist for a skin check, especially if you're at high risk for skin cancer.

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

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](#).