

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Nurses and Caregivers Are Crucial In The Healthcare System

*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. **May 6 is National Nurses' Day and the BHI is taking a moment to focus on the brain health of these important caregivers.***

For many years, nurses and caregivers have been hard at work in the background, taking care of the sick and the elderly. But the arrival of COVID-19 changed all that, bringing the important work of our frontline caregivers into the spotlight and highlighting a new kind of hero. But despite the early outpouring of recognition of our healthcare heroes, that support has slowly slipped away as the pandemic drags on.

Our lives have been changed by the pandemic. From remote work and school schedules to social distancing, wearing masks and carrying hand sanitizer: life in 2021 looks very different from life in 2019. Our caregivers — those people working in hospitals, nursing homes, hospice centers, and assisted-living facilities, ambulances, physician offices, and health clinics — suddenly found themselves on the frontline of a “war” with an unpredictable virus.

Along with the worries we all experienced, they also had to deal with:

- The fear and uncertainty of being at a heightened risk of infection.
- Worry that they may carry the virus home and infect loved ones.
- Inadequate supplies of the personal protective equipment needed to minimize the risk of infection.
- Ever-changing guidelines on how to stop the spread of the virus.
- Long and exhausting working hours taking care of the sick and covering for coworkers who became sick or were quarantined.
- Balancing their commitment to help others with the need to protect themselves and their loved ones.

A recent post from [Harvard Law](#) suggested the next wave of the pandemic will be the effects of this frontline trauma on the brain health of our healthcare workers, especially anxiety and depression. For many of them this trauma will result in the decision to leave healthcare — a decision that can have long-reaching effects throughout the healthcare industry. The article

suggests that we need to reinforce our support for our caregivers and provide easy access to mental health services and a renewed focus on their wellness in order to protect our caregivers and the future of healthcare.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

A recent [Harvard Business Review](#) article highlighted some suggestions from healthcare workers and the organizations they work for that can help caregivers survive the trauma they have experienced.

- Offer encouragement. Share positive messages and gratitude with workers. Check on them often, listen and offer support when needed.
- Provide space to debrief and recharge. If you live with a caregiver, provide them with time and space to let go of what happens at work.
- Look for ways to connect caregivers, either at work or virtually.
- Create resilience resources. These include meditation, fitness and yoga instruction, meals to go, and support groups.
- Provide easy access to brain health support.
- Encourage them 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](#).