

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Keys to Protecting Men's Health: Exercising Brain and Body

*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. **This BOOST, we take a look at what men can do to keep themselves and their brains healthy.***

This week is all about the men. The week leading up to Father's Day on Sunday (you got your dad a card, didn't you?) is Men's Health Week and we are focusing on healthier bodies and brains for men.

Many of the risk factors for disease are preventable and one of the most important things that men can do to lower their risk for many diseases is exercise — both their bodies and their brains. Exercising regularly helps to control appetite, boost mood, and improve sleep. In the long term, it reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia, depression, anxiety, substance overuse, and many cancers.

Exercise can also prevent brain fog, slow cognitive decline, and improve memory. According to [Harvard Health](#), 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, five days a week helps maintain healthy blood pressure and weight, improves energy, lifts mood, lowers stress and anxiety, and keeps the heart healthy, all of which contribute to brain health. But it also stimulates regions of the brain involved in memory function to release brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). This chemical helps rewire the brain's memory circuits, allowing them to work and perform better. A prime way to achieve these benefits is with moderate-intensity exercise.

Exercising the brain helps keep thinking skills and memory in shape. It is important for our brains to keep learning, throughout our lives. Brain activities that can keep your brain in shape include:

- Lifelong learning: Learning builds dense networks of connections between brain cells and learning something new strengthens cognitive reserve.
- Brain strain: Challenging tasks like learning a new language may be difficult, but they carry a bigger impact.
- Get out of your comfort zone: Putting yourself into new situations or different surroundings can challenge your mental skills.

- Be social: Social isolation puts us at risk of losing some of the brain reserves we have built up over a lifetime. Social settings that put us in contact with a variety of people and new situations can help keep our brains sharp.

Finally, men are less likely than women to get routine physical exams and screenings. In one study, more than half of the men surveyed had not seen their doctor for a physical exam in the previous year, with many saying they wait “as long as possible” to seek medical attention when they are feeling sick or in pain. Regular screenings for diseases and conditions that may not yet be causing symptoms are an important part of staying healthy. Regular checkups can help keep the men in our lives healthy for a long time to come.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommend men visit their health care provider regularly, even if they feel healthy. A regular medical checkup can:

Screen for medical issues.

Assess your risk for future medical problems.

Encourage a healthy lifestyle.

Update vaccinations.

Help you get to know your provider in case of an illness.

In addition, the NIH recommends the following health screenings for [men between the ages of 18 and 39](#):

BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING: At least once every two years. Annually if your numbers are over 120/80, if you have diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions.

CHOLESTEROL SCREENING AND HEART DISEASE PREVENTION: Men with no known risk factors for coronary disease should begin screening at age 35, or age 20 for men with known risk factors for coronary heart disease. Men with normal cholesterol levels do not need to have the test repeated for five years unless there are changes in lifestyle, including weight gain and diet. If you have diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions, you may need to be checked more often.

DIABETES SCREENING: Your doctor may recommend screening if your blood pressure is 130/80mm Hg or higher, you have a body mass index (BMI) greater than 25 and have other risk factors for diabetes, such as a first-degree relative with diabetes or history of heart disease.

DENTAL EXAM: See your dentist once or twice a year for an exam and cleaning.

EYE EXAM: If you have vision problems, have an eye exam every two years, or more often if recommended by your provider. Annually if you have diabetes.

IMMUNIZATIONS: Get an annual flu shot. At or after age 19, you should have a tetanus-diphtheria and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine if you did not receive it as an adolescent and get a tetanus-diphtheria booster every 10 years. You should receive two doses of varicella vaccine if you never had chickenpox or the varicella vaccine and the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine if you are not already

immune to MMR. Ask your provider about the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine if you are ages 19 to 26 and have not received the vaccine in the past. Your provider may recommend other immunizations if you have certain medical conditions, such as diabetes.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE SCREENING: All adults ages 18 to 79 should get a one-time test for hepatitis C. Depending on your lifestyle and medical history, you may need to be screened for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as syphilis, chlamydia, and HIV, as well as other infections.

PHYSICAL EXAM: Height, weight, and BMI should be checked at every exam. Your doctor may also ask about depression, diet and exercise, alcohol and tobacco use, personal safety, such as use of seat belts and smoke detectors, and skin cancer.

OTHER SCREENINGS: Your doctor may talk about colon cancer screening if you have a strong family history of colon cancer or polyps, or if you have had inflammatory bowel disease or polyps yourself.

For [men between the ages of 40 and 64](#), the NIH recommends:

- **BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING:** At least once every two years. Annually if your numbers are over 120/80, if you have diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions.
- **CHOLESTEROL SCREENING AND HEART DISEASE PREVENTION:** The recommended starting age for cholesterol screening is age 35 for men with no known risk factors for coronary heart disease. Men with normal cholesterol levels do not need to have the test repeated for five years unless there are changes in lifestyle, including weight gain and diet. If you have diabetes, heart disease, kidney problems, or certain other conditions, you may need to be checked more often.
- **COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING:** If you are under age 50, talk to your provider about getting screened, especially if you have a strong family history of colon cancer or polyps. Screening may also be considered if you have risk factors such as a history of inflammatory bowel disease or polyps. If you are age **50 to 75**, you should be screened for colorectal cancer, using one of these screening tests:
 - A fecal occult blood (stool-based) test done every year.
 - A fecal immunochemical test (FIT) every year.
 - A stool DNA test every three years.
 - Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years.
 - Double contrast barium enema every five years.
 - Virtual colonoscopy every five years.
 - Colonoscopy every 10 years

You may need a colonoscopy more often if you have risk factors for colorectal cancer, such as ulcerative colitis, personal or family history of colorectal cancer, or a history of growths called adenomatous polyps.

- **DENTAL EXAM:** See your dentist once or twice a year for an exam and cleaning.
- **DIABETES SCREENING:** If you are over age 44, you should be screened every three years. You may be screened at a younger age if you are overweight, have high blood pressure, or have other risk factors for diabetes for diabetes.
- **EYE EXAM:** Every two to four years ages 40 to 54 and every one to three years

ages 55 to 64. Your provider may recommend more frequent eye exams if you have vision problems or glaucoma risk. Have an eye exam at least every year if you have diabetes.

- **IMMUNIZATIONS:** Get an annual flu shot. Ask your doctor about getting a vaccine to reduce your risk of pneumococcal pneumonia. Get a tetanus-diphtheria and acellular pertussis (Tap) vaccine once as part of your tetanus-diphtheria vaccines if you did not receive it previously as an adolescent and a tetanus-diphtheria booster every 10 years. You may get a shingles or herpes zoster vaccination at or after age 50. Your doctor may recommend other immunizations if you are at high risk for certain conditions.
- **INFECTIOUS DISEASE SCREENING:** All adults ages 18 to 79 should get a one-time test for hepatitis C. Depending on your lifestyle and medical history, you may need to be screened for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as syphilis, chlamydia, and HIV, as well as other infections.
- **LUNG CANCER SCREENING:** If you are over age of 55, have a 30 pack-year smoking history, and you currently smoke or have quit smoking in the past 15 years, you should have an annual screening for lung cancer with low-dose computed tomography (LDCT).
- **OSTEOPOROSIS SCREENING:** If you are age 50 to 70 and have risk factors for osteoporosis, including long-term steroid use, low body weight, smoking, heavy alcohol use, having a fracture after age 50, or a family history of osteoporosis, you should discuss screening with your provider.
- **PHYSICAL EXAM:** Your blood pressure should be checked at least every year. Your provider may recommend checking your cholesterol every five years if you have risk factors for coronary heart disease. Your height, weight, and body mass index (BMI) should be checked at every exam. Your doctor may also ask about depression, diet and exercise, alcohol and tobacco use, personal safety, such as use of seat belts and smoke detectors, and skin cancer.
- **PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING:** If you're between the ages of 55 through 69, talk to your provider about the pros and cons of having a PSA test. If you are under the age of 55, screening is not generally recommended unless you have a higher risk for prostate cancer such as a family history of prostate cancer (especially a brother or father) or being African American. If you choose to be tested, the PSA blood test is repeated over time (yearly or less often), though the best frequency is not known.
- **SKIN EXAM:** Your doctor may check your skin for signs of skin cancer, especially if you're at high risk. People at high risk include those who have had skin cancer before, have close relatives with skin cancer, or have a weakened immune system.

And for men of all ages, don't forget to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY** and adopt a lifestyle that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:

- 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](#).