

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Staying Engaged is a Key to a Brain Healthy Retirement

*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. **In this Brain Boost we talk about planning for a brain healthy retirement.***

Retirement is much more than leaving the daily grind behind, it is a new stage of life. And just as we plan for our financial needs when we retire, we also need to plan for our brain health in order for retirement to be enjoyable, healthy, and rewarding.

The environmental changes that come with retirement reshape our behaviors, social interactions, and psychosocial stresses. Creating a new routine after leaving the daily grind brings on new stresses and can also bring a shift in our identity. Research shows that staying engaged can help ease this new phase of life. Whether it's volunteering, taking a class, or launching a new career — as long as it means something to us personally — we need to find something that keeps our brains engaged.

We also need to find the right level of engagement. Either a lack of engagement or taking on too much in retirement can lead to the same brain health outcomes and increase risk for brain illness including anxiety, depression, appetite loss, memory impairment, and insomnia. Exercising for fun and fitness, eating right, getting enough sleep, and finding activities that stimulate your mind are all important ways to ease the transition and stay healthy in retirement.

Researchers at the Massachusetts General Hospital [Laboratory of Adult Development](#) asked a group of study participants what elements support an enjoyable, healthy, and rewarding retirement. Four key elements emerged in the responses:

- **Social networks.** We don't just retire from a job—we retire from daily contact with friends and colleagues. Establishing a new social network is good for both mental and physical health.
- **Play.** Activities such as golf, bridge, ballroom dancing, traveling, and more can be fun and help us establish new friendships and reinforce old ones.
- **Creativity.** Activating our creative side helps keep our brain healthy. Creativity can take many forms: painting, gardening, crafts, cooking, learning a language. Being creative may also help us discover new things about ourselves.

- **Keep learning.** Like being creative, ongoing learning keeps the mind active and the brain healthy. There are many ways to keep learning, from taking up a new language to starting—or returning to—a favorite hobby or exploring a new subject.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The [Harvard Business Review](#) recently offered these planning tips for making your transition to retirement more rewarding and brain healthy.

- **Invest in personal relationships.** Start by spending more time with friends and family. Many studies show that close personal relationships, more than money or fame, are what make you happy.
- **Create networks beyond the office.** If you are nearing retirement, start looking for activities outside of the office. Volunteering in the community can provide both a sense of self-worth and access to new relationships. Look for opportunities to keep learning yourself or guide younger people. Contributing to the success of the next generation can bring enormous satisfaction.
- **Find new outlets.** If you're not ready to give up working altogether, look for part-time or interim employment as a consultant or board member for companies or nonprofits. Or look for a business mentor program that offers you the opportunity to help those just starting out in your career field.
- And 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](http://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](#).