

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Take Time for your Brain Health and De-stress this Summer

*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 BOOST, we are talking about the importance of making time to relax and reset.***

Let's stop and think about our daily life: Many of us, young and older, are constantly checking our smartphones. We are attempting to multi-task. Our work-life balance is non-existent because we have so much to do. All of these things are robbing many of us of the health, happiness, peace, and joy we crave.

Summer vacations typically provide us with needed downtime to rest, recover, and prepare for the busy fall and winter season ahead. But even if a summer getaway isn't part of the plan, it's still important to hit pause and reflect on our lives. In a recent interview with [The Harvard Gazette](#), author and Harvard Business School Professor Joseph Badaracco, said reflection is important, especially when we are struggling or transitioning.

In his book, [Step Back: How to Bring the Art of Reflection into Your Busy Life](#), Badaracco recommends four principles for reflection:

1. **Aim for good enough.** Let go of the idea that you must reflect in a time-consuming or perfect way. Good enough is an accomplishment.
2. **Downshift occasionally.** Resist the urge to be continuously productive and find a way to shift into a lower gear.
3. **Ponder the hard issues.** Step back and consciously look at a problem from a variety of perspectives. You don't have to come up with the answer right away.
4. **Pause and re-evaluate.** Before acting you need time to review the options and determine what works best in terms of what others expect and what expectations you have set for yourself.

Practicing mindfulness, purposely focusing your attention on the present moment, can help with pausing and reflecting. Mindfulness has been shown to increase our positive emotions, help us focus on our happiness, and improve our overall health and well-being, including brain health.

Mindfulness doesn't mean eliminating fear or blocking out the negative things happening around you, but rather that it's OK to be happy, to appreciate yourself and others and to achieve success, despite those things.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

If you are ready to hit pause and rethink what your life looks like going forward, the [New York Times Fresh Start Challenge](#) may be a great starting point. The 10-day challenge includes tips for mindful living, building stronger connections, and creating healthy habits.

Day 1: How are you really? Ask yourself how you really feel. Studies show that labeling your emotions and creating a “feeling vocabulary” is good for your health.

Day 2: Have an exercise snack. Instead of grabbing a cookie or chips, “snack” on a few minutes of exercise that can be done at any time, any place.

Day 3: Try a fierce meditation. Meditation can calm your mind, but it can also make you stronger and more focused on the challenges ahead. The [Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine](#) at Mass General offers several self-guided meditations.

Day 4: Ask a connection question. Form deeper ties with someone by asking questions that reveal something about the person — and be willing to share your answers. Ask questions that need to be explained, such as: What superpower would you like to have and why? What was your most embarrassing moment? Or what games did you like to play as a child?

Day 5: Resist your tech. Try reducing your screen time by taking breaks. Go for a walk without your phone or make the dinner table a screen-free zone.

Day 6: Meditate on the go. Find a simple meditation that allows you to focus on your breathing that you can do anywhere. Most smart watches have a breath app that reminds you to focus on your breathing throughout the day.

Day 7: Brush your way to a new habit. Use the time you spend brushing your teeth to do a simple exercise or meditation.

Day 8: Take a gratitude photo. Look — really look — at the people, places, and things around you and snap a photo. And remember to review your gratitude photo journal from time to time.

Day 9: Hug a little longer. If you missed hugging during the pandemic, hug someone today and hold that embrace just a few seconds longer. Focus on the present and enjoy the closeness.

Day 10: Give yourself a break. Be as kind to yourself as you are to others. Think about what you need right now and then do it. Being good to yourself can help you be kind to others.

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)

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](#).