

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Breakfast is Important for Your Brain

*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. **Today we are talking about how important a good breakfast is for your brain health and performance, and to decrease risk of brain illness.***

Breakfast. Our mothers told us it was the most important meal of the day. A healthy breakfast includes a balance of protein, dairy, fat, and carbohydrates — the elements vital to maintaining stamina and fending off hunger throughout the day.

Breakfast literally means breaking our overnight fast. As we sleep, our bodies are hard at work digesting yesterday's dinner and clearing up the information temporarily stored in our brains. By the time we wake up, our body and brain are demanding fresh fuel and hydration. Breaking the fast is how we power up in the morning and if we do it right, the benefits can last **ALL** day.

Scientific evidence shows that we experience improved cognitive (brain) performance, emotional regulation, and more sustained energy when we break our fast with foods that don't spike our blood sugars — foods with a lower glycemic load. The glycemic index ranks carbohydrates on a scale from 0 to 100 based on how quickly and how much they raise blood sugar levels after eating. Low-glycemic load foods have a rating of 55 or less. According to the [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Nutrition Source](#), breakfast foods with a lower glycemic index include bran cereals, apples, oranges, skim milk, steel cut oatmeal, rice cakes, whole grain breads, smoked salmon, avocado, and nuts.

So, what constitutes a healthy breakfast? One that delivers healthy protein, slowly digested carbohydrates, and fruit or vegetables. Good options include a veggie omelet with a slice of whole-grain toast, or a bowl of high-fiber (no-sugar added) cereal with reduced-fat almond, or soy milk, topped with fruit and a handful of almonds or walnuts.

And don't forget to hydrate first thing in the morning. Most of us are dehydrated when we awake from sleep and dehydration has been associated with decreased alertness, energy, and increased

grogginess and confusion — the way most of us feel when we first wake up. A glass of water immediately upon waking and before breakfast can boost cognition, increase energy, and wake the bodies of the entire family for that healthy breakfast.

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

To make sure you get your day off to a great start, BHI and [Harvard Health](#) recommend these tips for creating your own energy-boosting breakfast.

- **Choose whole grains.** High-fiber, whole-grain cereals and breads can help keep your blood sugar steady and avoid a mid-morning energy crash. With the hundreds of types of cereal on the market, organic and no-sugar-added bran cereal, bran flakes, and steel-cut oatmeal are typically the healthiest bets. To choose the healthiest breakfast cereal, read the label and look for:
  - Whole grain: should be the first ingredient listed.
  - Fiber: 5 grams or more per serving.
  - Sodium: less than 300 milligrams per serving.
  - Sugar: less than 5 grams per serving.
- **Include protein.** Greek yogurt and eggs (one a day for healthy people) are good choices. Egg yolks are high in cholesterol, but eggs have proteins, vitamins, and other nutrients and don't appear to increase the risk for developing heart disease. Nuts and salmon are a good source of protein that include healthy fats. Processed meats (yes, we mean bacon) are OK as an occasional treat but they are associated with a higher risk of colorectal cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.
- **Add greens to your breakfast.** Eggs and greens are a perfect match. Add spinach or kale to your omelet or breakfast scramble, add some broccoli to a quiche, or just sauté greens in olive oil for a delicious breakfast dish.
- **Eat at home.** Everybody loves going out for pancakes but eating breakfast at a restaurant usually means starting your day with loads of refined carbohydrates and saturated fat. And the breakfast offerings from fast-food chains tend to be high-sodium, high-sugar, and low-fiber disasters. If you go out to breakfast, stick to steel-cut oatmeal, fresh fruit, greens, and a healthy protein.
- **Replace coffee with green tea.** Both beverages give you a boost in the morning, but green tea has additional health benefits, including antioxidants. It can also help reduce anxiety and inflammation.
- **Whip up a breakfast smoothie.** Combine fruit, juice, yogurt, wheat germ, tofu, kale or spinach, and other ingredients. Toss them in your blender with a bit of ice and you have a refreshing, high energy, and tasty breakfast.
- 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](#).