

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



It's Important to Care for Yourself Too!

*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 discuss the importance of self-care for our brain health and performance.***

Self-care is one of those things that we often neglect in our everyday lives. We often put the needs of others ahead of our own, but as the saying goes: You can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of yourself first is essential to your brain health.

True self-care is not selfish — it is simply keeping the focus on your own life. It's about paying attention to how you feel in each moment, communicating clearly, speaking up for yourself, and saying yes or no without guilt. We all feel overwhelmed by too much work, hectic schedules, and not enough sleep, but the foundation of self-care isn't time management: It's changing your mindset and putting yourself first.

A recent article in the [Harvard Business Review](#) pointed out that it is important to find your own approach to self-care. For some of us, it may be watching a favorite TV show after a long day. For others, it may be turning off our phone when we get home. We need to look for the small changes that help invigorate us when we are feeling drained to help us determine what our minds, bodies, and spirits need.

It's also important to remind our teens and young adults about the importance of self-care. It is especially difficult for them to find the time amidst the pressing demands of classes, finding a job, or starting their career. Research shows that investments in our well-being can actually enhance our professional success. By helping them establish a mindset of putting themselves first, we can set them up for better brain health and performance throughout the course of their life.

Sometimes, all we need is a reminder to put us on the right track. The BHI has partnered with [Cope Notes](#), a subscription-based app that uses daily messages to train our brains to think healthy. Subscribers receive daily exercises, encouragement, psychology facts, and more sent

straight to their phones at a random time each day. The messages don't replace counseling or therapy, but they are a step toward a healthier brain. Brain Health Champions can save 10 percent on a Cope Notes subscription and the proceeds from the partnership help support the Brain Health Scholar program.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

During turbulent times, the BHI and the [Massachusetts General Hospital Healthy Lifestyle Program](#) recommend these strategies for practicing self-care.

1. **Take time for you.** Everyone is struggling. Between work, school, and family obligations you are overloaded and overcommitted. While it's important to keep going, it's also important to check out from time to time. Allow yourself time to check out physically, mentally, and emotionally on a regular basis and check in with yourself. Listen to your body and your brain.
2. **Eat healthy.** When you are busy and overwhelmed, good nutrition and healthy eating can easily fall by the wayside. During times of increased physical and mental stress, healthy eating is vital to supporting your immune system. If the COVID-19 pandemic has you eating at home more, use this as an opportunity to try out some new healthy recipes using fresh ingredients. Check out our [Brain Boost: Eating Right As We Age](#) for more information.
3. **Move.** Physical activity is important to your physical and brain health. Even if you feel like you don't have time to work out you can set SMART goals — Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timed — for exercise. This might include a 20-minute walk, a five-mile bike ride, or 20 minutes of light housekeeping — yes even housework counts as physical activity. These small steps are easy to achieve and can fuel your motivation. Check out this [Brain Boost: Exercise for Enhancing Brain Health and Optimizing Brain Performance](#) for guidance.
4. **Prioritize sleep.** Your body needs sleep to function. Setting up a sleep routine and creating a healthy sleep environment can help you get the sleep you need. You can learn more about getting a good night's sleep from our [Brain Boost: How Much Sleep Do You Need?](#)
5. **Maintain social connections.** Earlier this week we talked about how being lonely can have a negative impact on your physical and brain health and performance, including your immune system, blood pressure, cognitive function, mood, weight, and sleep. The best way to conquer isolation is to stay active and socially engaged. Check out this [Brain Boost: Social Connection is Good for Brain Health](#) for ways to stay socially connected.
6. **Manage stress.** Eating healthy, being active, and getting enough sleep all help mitigate the effects of stress and anxiety on your bodies. An attitude of gratitude can also help you manage your stress. Acknowledging the good in your life is a powerfully positive action. For more tips about managing your stress check out [Brain Boost: Managing Stress Makes a Difference](#).
7. **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 that works 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](#).