



## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Moving for Brain Health and Wellness

*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. **October is Emotional Wellness Month, and we are focusing on how physical activity promotes brain health and well-being.***

From finances to family, stress is part of our lives. Those stressful demands can take a toll on our emotional health but one way to manage our stress is with physical activity. In addition to promoting our physical health, regular exercise has been shown to help boost our mood and immunity, while protecting and promoting brain health.

For those of us who hate huffing and puffing at the gym, improving our health and well-being doesn't necessarily require a strenuous workout with aching muscles and lots of sweating (and swearing). For improved brain health, better sleep, lower blood pressure, reduced pain, and a boost to our immune system, we need look no further than the time-tested practice of yoga.

Yoga works across multiple systems in the body to support brain health in a variety of ways, including:

- Enhanced flexibility.
- Build strength.
- Increased endurance.
- Increased mood.
- Reduced risk of depression, anxiety, and stress.
- Increased energy levels.
- Boost immunity.
- Improved balance and lower your risk of falling.

In addition to movement, yoga focuses on mindfulness — being aware and in the moment. Practicing mindfulness can help control your heart rate and breathing while lowering the level of some stress hormones in your body that increase risk of brain illness and decrease brain

performance. According to [Harvard Health](#), practicing yoga helps strengthen the parts of the brain that play a key role in memory, attention, awareness, thought, and language.

While all forms of exercise help boost our mood by reducing stress hormone levels, increasing the production of feel-good endorphins, and delivering oxygenated blood to the brain, yoga has additional mood-boosting benefits. Studies examining the effects of relaxation techniques on depression and anxiety in older adults, found that yoga, massage therapy, progressive muscle relaxation, stress management, and listening to music all provide some benefit, but yoga and music were the most effective and provided the longest-lasting relief for depression and anxiety.

When it comes to battling stress, yoga simultaneously releases tension while improving strength, balance, flexibility, and overall health. No pill has the power to improve our well-being more than this ancient practice of postures, breathing practices, deep relaxation, and meditation.

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

*Whether you would like to learn more about yoga, or if you are a long-time practitioner, there are many types of yoga that can help improve your sense of well-being. Ranging from relaxing to vigorous, each type offers a different series of poses and breathing techniques designed to lead you to the appropriate level of better health and fitness.*

- **Hatha yoga.** A Hatha class is a good starting point if you are a beginner or looking for a less intense yoga experience. Hatha focuses on the unification of the yoga postures (asanas) with the breathing exercises (pranayama) to bring peace to your body and mind.
- **Iyengar yoga.** Iyengar is based on Hatha yoga but focuses more on your body alignment and precision.
- **Vinyasa yoga.** Vinyasa is a more rigorous form of movement emphasizing near-constant motion, or flow. Movements are strung together using your breath as a guiding force. Vinyasa yoga is often recommended for more seasoned practitioners or those looking to complement other forms of exercise.
- **Hot yoga.** Hot yoga gets its name from the temperature of the room —usually between 80- and 100-degrees Fahrenheit. The heat assists in detoxification and assists with flexibility.
- **Ashtanga yoga.** Ashtanga yoga is high power, high heat, and high energy. It focuses on the synchronization of your breath with rapid movements.
- **Restorative yoga.** Restorative yoga focuses on soothing both your mind and body through a combination of deep breathing and passive stretching designed to open and expand various muscle groups. Positions are held for much longer than in the typical yoga class, allowing you the chance to fully open up and let go of tension.
- **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 approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is creating brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address 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](#).