



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Seniors Benefit from a Brain Healthy Life

*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 discussing the benefits of living an active, brain-healthy life across the lifespan.***

We can't slow down time, but we can slow down the effects of aging by living an active, and brain healthy life. Research shows that older people who actively focus on a healthy, vibrant lifestyle can avoid some of the dangers related to sedentary aging and reduce risk of brain illness, including dementia.

As our bodies age, so do our brains. Many of us begin to notice changes in memory around the age of 50. We may not be able to remember someone's name or struggle to think of the right word. As the structure of our brain ages, so does its ability to process information quickly. Factors such as stress, anxiety, fatigue, distractions, medications, poor vision or hearing, sleep disturbances, depression, chronic pain, alcohol overuse, and overwork can also lead to a decline in our ability to process and remember information.

Luckily, there are steps we can take to correct many of these factors. Cardiovascular fitness, for example, is closely linked to our brain health and memory. According to [Harvard Health](#), regular exercise and maintaining cardiovascular fitness will help preserve brain health and memory function. Other protective factors for promoting brain health include good nutrition, maintaining a healthy weight, and exercising the brain, with cognitive stimulating behaviors, throughout our lives can help delay, and even reduce, memory and cognitive issues as we age.

Recent research from the Netherlands is looking at people they call "cognitive super-agers:" people late in life whose brains function as if they were 30 years younger. According to a recent article in the [New York Times](#), this study of people who have reached the age of 100 while still living independently hopes to identify reliable characteristics and develop treatments that would result in healthy cognitive aging for most of us.

In the meantime, living a brain healthy lifestyle that includes exercise, eating the right foods, plenty of healthy sleep, strong social connections, and activities that involve using our brain power seems to be the key to living a long, brain-healthy life.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

There are many ways for everyone, including seniors to live an active, brain-healthy lifestyle. Here are just a few suggestions from the BHI to help you fight the aging process and reduce risk of brain illness, including dementia.

- **Keep moving.** It's natural to experience more aches and pains as you age, but regular movement can help ease your pain and improve your flexibility. Try low-impact exercise programs like walking, yoga, swimming, or tai-chi.
- **Protect your skin.** Your skin becomes less elastic as you age leading to wrinkles. Protect your skin and minimize the presence of wrinkles by avoiding direct sun exposure and not smoking or vaping. Be aware that what you put on your skin is absorbed into your body. Read the labels of skincare, bug spray, and sunscreen, and avoid products that may be harmful to your brain health and performance. Prevent dryness by staying hydrated, limiting alcohol, and taking short showers in warm (not hot) water.
- **Build muscle.** If you don't use those muscles, you'll lose them. Many scientific studies found that strength training led to overall benefits to cognitive performance, benefits linked to protection from degeneration in specific subregions of the hippocampus. The hippocampus is a complex structure in the brain with a major role in learning and memory. Muscle is also essential to the health of the brain as it prevents falls, a leading risk factor. Build strength and muscle with 30-minutes of weight training exercises 2-3 days a week, such as squats or curls. Walking, swimming, and even gardening can help build muscle.
- **Get enough sleep.** It can be harder to get a good night's sleep as you age. Quality sleep is essential to promoting brain health and reducing risk to brain illness. You may have trouble falling asleep or find yourself waking up more in the night. Try limiting your intake of caffeine and alcohol — both can have a negative impact on your sleep. Talk to your doctor if health issues, such as high blood pressure, bladder or prostate issues, or reflux are keeping you from getting a good night's sleep.
- **Exercise your memory.** Lapses in memory are natural as you get older, but there are things you can do to help strengthen your brain performance and keep your memory sharp. Regular exercise, good nutrition, and strong social connections have all been shown to help stretch your memory muscle. Making lists and following an established routine can also help if you are having trouble remembering.
- **Watch your weight.** It is harder to lose weight as you age so good nutrition and exercise are important for keeping your weight in check. Stock up on brain healthy fruits, nuts and seeds, vegetables, and lean protein, avoid sugar and saturated fats and watch the size of your portions.
- **Maintain social connections.** Retirement, empty nest, loss of a spouse — many things that happen as we age can lead to loneliness. Loneliness increases risk of

brain illness. Make social interactions part of your daily routine by volunteering, chatting with neighbors, or calling a family member. A pet can be great company and the daily walks can be a fun way to exercise and meet people in your neighborhood.

- **Stay healthy.** As you age you tend to develop more health problems so see your doctor for regular checkups and take all medications as prescribed. Even if you don't have any health problems, regular checkups can help identify health problems in their early stages when they are most treatable. Talk with your physician about how to protect the health of your brain and monitor for potential symptoms of brain illness.
- **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 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](#).