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## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### 'Eat Real' for Brain Health

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 focus on eating healthy, nutritious, and sustainable food — an important component of protecting our brain health.**

Eating right can keep our bodies and our brains healthy. The right foods can help optimize our brain performance and decrease our risk of developing brain illness as we age. One of the themes of National Food Day is “eat real,” seeking a balance between nutrition, affordability, and the environment when making food choices that support our brain health.

Different foods can have a positive or negative impact on our health, and they can have the same impact on our environment. [The Nutrition Source](#) at Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health says a “planetary health diet” can nurture both people and the planet. As the world has become more urbanized, its population has transitioned away from a healthy, plant-based diet to the more animal-based western diet.

BHI’s NeuroNutritionist and *New York Times* best-selling author, Dr. Uma Naidoo, says what we eat affects more than our bodies; it also affects our brains. In her book, [This is Your Brain on Food](#), the Harvard-trained psychiatrist, nutrition expert, and chef, explains the many ways in which food contributes to our brain health and shows how eating real can help treat and prevent a wide range of brain health issues.

“The food we eat has a profound effect on our brain,” Dr. Naidoo said. “Food can boost our immunity, which is also linked to levels of depression and anxiety; studies also show a link to insomnia, dementia and beyond.”

A plant-based diet is more sustainable than the western diet heavy on processed foods. Food production places an enormous demand upon our natural resources and contributes to climate

change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and drastic changes in land and water use.

Healthy food organizations, like the National Fisheries Institute (NFI) and the Wild Blueberry Association of North America have joined together to promote brain-boosting foods through the free digital brochure the [Cognition Kitchen](#). According to NFI dietitians Rima Kleiner, MS, RD, and Jennifer McGuire, MS, RD, the Cognition Kitchen guide supports the Dietary Guidelines for Americans with simple, science-based information about brain-healthy foods and delicious recipes.

The [EAT-Lancet Commission](#) has developed scientific targets for healthy and sustainable food systems that feature a variety of high-quality, plant-based foods and low amounts of animal-based foods, refined grains, added sugars, and unhealthy fats. Designed with the goal of feeding a future population of 10 billion people a healthy diet within planetary boundaries, the planetary health diet will require transforming our eating habits, improving food production, and reducing food waste.

Watch for more information coming soon from the BHI about the Be Brain Healthy: Be Brain Powerful Movement, Campaign and Challenge. This includes a Lifestyle Medicine for the Brain program with a focus on healthy eating, food sourcing, and food preparation through its collaboration with Dr. Naidoo and [Chef Barton Seaver](#), one of the world's leading sustainable seafood experts and educators and several restaurateurs and nutritional experts from the Suncoast region and beyond.

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

*Eating a planetary health diet is good for the environment and it can improve your brain health. Here are some suggestions from the BHI for foods that protect your brain health and the planet.*

- **Eat more fish.** Fish is packed with nutrients that support healthy brain development and daily performance including protein, healthy omega-3 fats, vitamins B12 and D, iron, and other essential minerals.
- **Make fruits or vegetables part of every meal or snack.** Put fruit on cereal, eat a piece of fruit at lunch, and include vegetables with your family dinner. For healthy snacks, keep ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables in a visible place where your family is more likely to grab them as a snack.
- **Serve more salads.** Prewashed, organic greens and pre-mixed salad are easy to prepare. Just add a healthy oil and lemon or lime dressing to enhance the flavor of the salad.
- **Go pescatarian.** Many family favorites have meat alternatives so look for recipes for spaghetti, lasagna, chili, or other foods that use vegetables or fish instead of meat. Your brain needs protein for tissue growth, repair, and maintenance, but there are other sources of protein besides meat: think green leafy vegetables, nuts and seeds, legumes, eggs, nonfat or low-fat dairy products, or fish and seafood. Beans are an excellent source of protein, are packed with iron and vitamins, and they are low in fat. Look for organic canned black beans, red kidney beans, cannellini, butter beans or navy beans.

- **Get plenty of vitamin A and C.** Vitamin A and vitamin C are important to your brain health and cognitive function and fruits and vegetables are the best sources of these important vitamins. Try to include leafy green or yellow vegetables, such as kale, spinach, broccoli, winter squash, greens; carrots; oranges or grapefruit; strawberries; melon; tomato; or broccoli, in your diet.
- **Load up on antioxidants.** Antioxidants prevent or slow damage to your cells caused by free radicals — unstable molecules your body produces as a reaction to environmental and other pressures. Foods rich in antioxidants produce known brain health benefits especially strawberries and blueberries, which get their color and memory-improving ability from flavonoids. Check out our [Boost](#) about blueberries to learn more about this mighty berry! Other foods high in antioxidants include almonds, dark chocolate, bell peppers, dark green leafy vegetables, and tomatoes.
- **Stick to healthy fats.** Not all fat is bad. Monounsaturated fats, found in olives and olive oil, canola oil, avocados, nuts, and fish, can have anti-inflammatory effects that can help stave off brain illnesses and heart disease.
- **Spice it up!** Spices like ginger, garlic, turmeric, and capsaicin (from chili peppers) have brain healthy properties and can add flavor to soup, stew, stir-fry, or salad dressing.
- **Snack on nuts and seeds.** Nuts and seeds are excellent sources of protein and healthy fats. Walnuts are high in a type of omega-3 fatty acid called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), linked to lower blood pressure and cleaner arteries, and may also improve memory. Studies have also linked higher walnut consumption to improved cognitive test scores.
- **Get caffeinated.** Tea and coffee may give you a boost in the morning, but research shows higher caffeine consumption leads to better scores on mental function tests and helps solidify new memories.
- **Hydrate.** Water is a miracle fluid. It carries nutrients and oxygen to your cells, flushes toxins from your body, helps digestion, protects your organs, regulates your body temperature, and maintains your electrolyte balance. Make sure you are drinking at least eight, eight-ounce glasses of water a day.
- ***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](#).