



## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Helping Others Helps Your 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 are addressing how helping others makes a difference in our own brain health.***

Doing something nice for someone else without expecting anything in return makes us feel good. Making a difference helps people in need and supports our communities, but the often-unrecognized benefit is that it also promotes our own sense of well-being, boosting our brain health and performance and decreasing risk of brain illness.

Whether we are making a charitable donation, volunteering for a non-profit, or just holding the door for someone, random acts of kindness can improve our brain and physical health. One [study](#) from the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard found that volunteering for just two hours a week can lower the risk of early death and improve the sense of well-being in older adults.

Just as happiness can improve our brain health and longevity, studies show that spreading unhappiness can be especially toxic to those around us. Being unhappy not only makes us miserable, but long-term studies suggest that people in a relationship with someone who is unhappy tend to be unhealthier and live shorter lives than people who are in cheerful and caring environments.

Let's face it, we all prefer to be around people who are happy. Making a difference in the life of someone else is a win-win: bringing happiness to them and to us. National Make A Difference Day is the perfect opportunity to look for ways that we can increase the happiness and brain health of ourselves and those around us.

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

*It doesn't require a lot of effort or expense to make a difference in the life of someone. Here are just a few suggestions for ways you can improve the brain health of yourself and those around you.*

- **Volunteer.** One of the greatest gifts that you can give is your time. There are many nonprofits in the community in need of your help. Visit [Volunteer Match](#) and enter your zip code to find an organization that is a match for your interests.
- **Donate.** It doesn't matter if it's cash, food, clothing, household items, or personal items — the need is great. There are too many organizations to list, but for starters try [All Faiths Food Bank](#), [Food Bank of Manatee](#), [Resurrection House](#), or [Turning Points](#). Or visit [The Thrift Shopper](#) and enter your zip code for a list of resale stores that accept donations.
- **Foster.** The animal shelters are filled with pets waiting for their “forever” home, but if you aren't ready to adopt why not try fostering a pet? And don't be surprised if your foster fails and you end up with a new member of the family. Check with the [Humane Society of Sarasota County](#), [Humane Society of Manatee](#), or the [Human Society of Lakewood Ranch](#) for foster opportunities.
- **Bring a smile.** Making a difference can be as simple as sending a smile. If you are short on time, or can't get out to volunteer, try sending cards and letters to nursing home residents or members of the armed forces. Learn more about bringing a smile to strangers at [Love for Our Elders](#) or [A Million Thanks](#).
- **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](#).