



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Tips for Caring for Someone with Alzheimer's

*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. **In today's Boost, we talk about the important role of the caregiver.***

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or dementia changes someone's life, and the life of everyone around them. When it happens to our loved one, we often find our role of spouse, partner, or adult child changes to the challenging role of primary caregiver.

Caring for someone with dementia is a demanding job. The person's symptoms will vary from day to day, and sometimes hour to hour. At times, it may seem like our loved one is being deliberately uncooperative or difficult, but it is actually just part of the disease process. Fatigue, anxiety, discomfort, or medications can all influence whether or not someone with dementia has a good day or bad day.

In addition to assisting our loved one with the activities of daily living — eating, sleeping, dressing, bathing, and personal hygiene — we also need to make sure we provide a safe environment. An environment that may seem safe to us can be filled with hidden hazards for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia. If our loved one is a wanderer, we may also need to make sure our safety check includes measures that help prevent them from slipping away unnoticed.

But one of the most important things we can do when caring for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia is to take care of ourselves. By learning everything we can about the disease and seeking the help we need we can protect our loved one and our own brain health. The [Alzheimer's Association](#) offers resources and caregiver support including support groups, tips, care options, and legal and financial planning.

Another great resource for caregivers is the Harvard Health publication [Alzheimer's Disease: A guide to diagnosis, treatment, and caregiving](#). The downloadable booklet offers a number of tips and hints for caregivers, including practical advice for daily routines and explaining an Alzheimer's

diagnosis to a loved one and family members, as well as important guidance on safety.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

If you are caring for someone with Alzheimer's, it is important to remember to take care of yourself and protect your own brain health. The BHI and Harvard Health offer these tips for self-care.

- **Get organized.** It is important to take an organized approach to providing care. Get your family together to discuss what kind of care is needed for your loved one. Who will be the primary caregiver? How will you pay for it? Everyone should have a role in this discussion and the decisions being made, as well as tasks for which they are responsible. It will also help to organize your loved one's medical information. Create a binder or file that includes information on their current health, medications, allergies, medical history, specialists seen, and treatments, as well as all legal documents.
- **Make the ask.** Don't try to do everything yourself. Many people are ready and willing to help, so ask them. Are there friends or neighbors who can lend a hand? Is there a family member who can give you a break? Make a list of things that people can do, such as cooking an occasional dinner or running errands, so that when they ask what they can do to help you have an answer.
- **Provide support.** If another family member is the primary caregiver, offer to help — and be specific. Offer to take over for a weekend, cook meals, help with house cleaning, or provide transportation to doctor's appointments.
- **Take a break.** Respite care from professionals, family, and friends can give you a much-needed break. If your loved one is receiving hospice care, the Medicare Hospice Benefit covers the cost of providing you with a break from your caregiving duties while your loved one is cared for in a Medicare-certified inpatient facility.
- **Find a support group.** Virtual or in-person support groups give you a chance to talk out frustrations and share helpful ideas with other caregivers. The [Florida Gulf Coast Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association](#) can provide assistance in finding a support group.
- **Take care of yourself.** Make sure you are eating right and getting enough sleep. Relaxation techniques such as mindful meditation and exercise can help relieve your stress and protect your own brain health. Make time for the things that bring you joy and keep a list or resources that you can call when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- **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](#).