



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



A Day for Thanks, and a Day for Giving

*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's Boost talks about how giving to others is also giving to our own brain health.***

Today we are giving thanks. We are grateful for our family and friends, the food on our tables, and the roof over our heads and we are thankful that we are happy and healthy. But many of us are also thinking about the people who don't share these blessings: the hard-working families who are struggling to simply survive.

The Tuesday after Thanksgiving has been designated as the National Day of Giving to remind us to give to those less fortunate. While Sarasota is ranked among Florida's most affluent communities, many residents of Florida's Suncoast are struggling to make ends meet and live a stable, healthy life. And while our generosity helps those in need, it is not entirely selfless.

According to a [2006 study](#) from the National Institutes of Health, giving activates the reward centers of the brain. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), the study linked generosity with increased activity in the areas of the brain directly related to increased happiness. Giving increases positive emotions and that is a brain thing. **Serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins** are famously happy hormones that promote positive feelings like pleasure, happiness, and even love. Hormones and neurotransmitters are involved in lots of essential processes, like heart rate and digestion, but also mood and feelings.

Research also suggests that giving to someone else makes us happier than spending money on ourselves. We get the same brain health boost whether we are buying gifts for our loved ones or giving our time, energy, or money to service organizations. In fact, the gift does not have to be a tangible item, it could be as simple as a smile, opening the door for another, a letter, or a phone call.

Giving to others can also make us healthier. A wide range of research links generosity to better health, finding that elderly people who help others, either providing care for a family member or volunteering for charitable organizations, are less likely to die over a five-year period: even after

taking into account their age, health, and lifestyle.

The takeaway from this research is to open your heart and have a meaning-filled and brain healthy holiday season.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

In the spirit of holiday giving, there are many ways to support your community. 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 from the BHI for ways you can improve the lives of others and promote and protect your brain health.

- One of the greatest gifts that you can give is your time and 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.
- The [Season of Sharing](#) campaign, managed by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, is a community-wide initiative founded on collaboration and partnership to help families in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and DeSoto counties who are in crisis regain stability.
- It doesn't matter if it's cash, food, clothing, household items, or personal items — the need is great and there are too many organizations to list. For starters try visiting the websites of [All Faiths Food Bank](#), [Food Bank of Manatee](#), [Resurrection House](#), or [Turning Points](#). Or visit [Great Nonprofits](#) and look for charitable organizations in your community.
- 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 holiday 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)

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](#).