



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Eating Vegan for Better 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 talking about how a vegan diet can help improve brain health.***

Most of us think eating healthy will improve our heart health, help us maintain a healthy weight, and protect us from getting sick. But research shows that eating a healthy, plant-based diet can also improve our mood, productivity, and brain health.

What we eat impacts our brain's ability to function. The foods we eat are broken down into nutrients that are carried to the brain to support brain health and performance, including learning, memory, and cellular clean-up. These brain-essential nutrients are primarily found in whole foods: foods which are unprocessed, without harmful fats, sodium, and sugar, and derived mostly from plant sources.

Brain-essential nutrients enhance brain health and performance and fight brain illness by spurring the release of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine. Fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains, and legumes are packed with fiber that helps slow digestion and control inflammation and blood sugar. Monounsaturated fats, found in olive oil, nuts, and fish, can have anti-inflammatory effects that can help stave off brain illnesses and heart disease. BHI's NeuroNutritionist and best-selling author, [Uma Naidoo, MD](#), recommends including more of these immune-boosting foods in your diet.

In an article for [Harvard Health](#), Dr. Naidoo also suggests that eating anti-inflammatory foods creates a healthier gut microbiome, which — in turn — boosts your energy and mood. Inflammation in the body results in less energy for the brain, so eating anti-inflammatory foods helps you wake up in a good mood and stay energized and focused through the day.

At least nine different families of fruits and vegetables exist, each with potentially hundreds of different plant compounds that are beneficial to health. For a brain-healthy vegan diet, start by eating a variety of produce and adding high-quality fats (nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil), carbohydrates (whole grains, fruit, starchy root vegetables), and plant-based protein (tofu,

beans, lentils, nuts, seeds,) to get the vitamins, minerals, fiber, and phytochemicals required for optimal health and gives your body the mix of nutrients it needs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

With a little planning, your plant-based diet can be healthy and balanced. The BHI and [Harvard Health](#) suggest you make sure your diet includes these nutrients for better brain health.

- **Vegetables.** Leafy green vegetables like kale, spinach, sea greens, and arugula are packed with lutein, vitamin K, nitrate, folate, alpha-tocopherol, beta-carotene, and kaempferol: crucial nutrients that have impressive health benefits.
- **Fruits.** Blueberries, strawberries, cranberries, and goji berries have some of the greatest amounts of antioxidants around. Berries also contain flavonoids, which have been shown to have mood-boosting properties
- **Whole grains.** Whole grains, such as barley, brown rice, oatmeal, and buckwheat, retain all parts of the seed and are a good source of fiber and important vitamins and nutrients.
- **Nuts and seeds.** Nuts and seeds are a great source of plant-based protein and healthy fat.
- **Protein.** Many vegan foods are rich in protein, including tofu, lentils, beans or peas, soy or nut milk, nuts and seeds, and plant-based meat alternatives.
- **Healthy fats.** Healthy, vegan fats include olive, canola, sunflower, safflower, soybean, and corn oil; nuts and seeds; and avocado. Foods containing alpha-linolenic acid, a type of fat that can be converted into essential omega-3 fats such as flax seeds and flax oil, chia seeds, hemp seed oil, walnuts or walnut oil, canola oil, and soybean oil are also essential for your brain health.
- **Calcium.** Without dairy, your vegan diet can lack calcium. Plant-based sources of calcium include tofu, calcium-enriched fruit juice, cooked Chinese cabbage, turnip greens, mustard greens, collard greens, or fortified plant milks (soy, almond, cashew).
- **Vitamin B12.** Vitamin B12 keeps your blood and nerve cells healthy and helps make DNA. Animal foods are the main source of vitamin B12 so there are only two reliable sources of vitamin B12 for vegans: fortified foods and supplements. Fortified foods include plant milks (soy, almond, cashew), meat alternatives, fortified cereals, and nutritional yeast. Or ask your doctor about taking a vitamin B12 supplement.
- **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](#).