



## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Walking for a Healthier Brain

*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 sharing how walking and hiking can protect and improve our brain health.***

Walking and hiking are good for us. In addition to exercising our bodies and getting us outdoors, walking and hiking can improve our mood and keep us young. When it comes to the impact physical activity has on our brain health, walking can improve our brain performance, including boosting our mood and cognitive performance, and reducing the risk of brain illness, including depression and dementia. And while we can't stop the aging process, exercise can help slow down the process.

Walking at a moderate pace raises our heart rate and causes us to breathe deeper, increasing oxygen flow to the brain. For individuals of all ages, research shows that just 20 to 30 minutes of walking before taking on a task that requires brain power can quicken our reaction time, sharpen our focus, increase our memory retrieval, expand creativity, and enhance decision making.

Taking a hike combines the benefits of walking with the brain health boost we get from being outside in nature. Researchers studying ecotherapy, nature-based programs that address brain and physical health, have linked experiencing and enjoying nature with increased creativity, energy, immunity, and productivity, in addition to reducing our stress and anxiety levels.

Before the rush of the holiday season, why not establish a new brain health habit, starting with a walk in the great outdoors? Check out some local park favorites: [Myakka River State Park](#), [Oscar Scherer State Park](#), [Ken Thompson Park](#) or learn about all the available hikes in [Sarasota county](#) and [Manatee county](#).

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

*There are so many benefits to walking, hiking, and moving of any type outside. You don't need a gym membership or special equipment, just put on your walking shoes or hiking boots and walk out the door. In addition to exercise, getting outside for a walk has these additional brain health benefits.*

- **Produce Vitamin D.** Your body uses sunlight to make vitamin D, which is essential for brain cells, bones, and your immune system.
- **Reduce Anxiety.** Walking outdoors raises your energy levels and keeps you feeling calm and positive. Exercise and sunlight help reduce anxiety and boost your serotonin levels, the brain chemicals that improve your mood.
- **Increase social connections.** Getting out of the house, school, or office can help you connect to other people and those social connections act as a buffer, protecting you against the negative physical and mental effects of stress. In fact, why not grab a friend or family member and take a hike together?
- **Improve sleep.** Physical activity helps you sleep better, and exposure to sunlight also helps set your internal clock to keep your body on a regular sleep schedule.
- **Boost your creativity and problem-solving skills.** Being outside engages your brain in a quieter way. If you're struggling with a problem or have hit a mental block on a project, step outside for a walk and let your brain refocus.
- **Learn more.** BHI Advisor and faculty member, Jennifer Walsh, is connecting people and nature through her [Walks With Walsh](#) program in New York City. Find out more about her mission and learn about the people, products, places, and spaces that are nature smart on her website. Stay tuned about BHI Walking programs.
- **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](#).