



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Holiday Overeating Affects Your Waistline, and Your 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 talking about how eating too much slows down the body and the brain.***

Many of our holiday traditions are centered around food — too much food. Between the family dinners, holiday parties, and the endless parade of cookies and other goodies at home, school, and work, we often have that uncomfortable feeling that comes from eating too much.

Overindulging during the holidays may make us sleepy and our pants a little tighter, but research suggests that constantly overeating has long-term effects on our brain and physical health. In addition to weight gain and obesity-related illnesses, chronic overeating can also lead to mild cognitive impairment and memory loss.

It has been nearly 10 years since researchers uncovered the link between high calorie intake and mild cognitive impairment —characterized by problems with memory, language, thinking, or judgment. One study found that eating between 2,100 and 6,000 calories a day can double the risk for people over the age of 70. Researchers are continuing their work to identify how mental decline is related to obesity.

The bottom line: When it comes to holiday eating, pay attention to what you are eating and stop before you are full.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The key to maintaining a healthy weight is eating brain healthy foods and burning more calories than you consume. Determining your daily caloric intake depends on your age, height, weight, activity level, and overall health. Talk to your doctor about setting a good target weight. These tips from the BHI can also help you eat for better brain health.

- **Eat with brain health in mind.** All calories are not created equal. The right kinds of calories are important for maintaining your brain health. A diet that is rich in fish, vegetables, legumes, avocado, olive oil, nuts and seeds, and whole grains, can decrease your risk of developing cognitive impairment later in life as well as slow the progression if you are already experiencing symptoms.
- **Avoid the “usual suspects.”** Sugary treats are a part of many holiday traditions but try to eat them in moderation. Sugar, fried foods, and processed foods are empty calories that add pounds while eroding your brain health and increasing your risk of developing brain illness.
- **Don’t go to extremes.** Being overweight or underweight is not healthy. If you are overweight, don’t starve yourself in your attempt to lose weight. If you are underweight or frail, try boosting your calorie intake with diet aids or protein drinks. Your diet should include all the important vitamins and nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.
- **Get help.** A dietitian can help you develop an eating plan with the right number of calories and a healthy mix of tasty and nutritious foods.
- **Check out our [Brain BOOSTS](#).** Many of our Brain BOOSTS focus on nutrition and brain health, like this one about [Eating Real for Brain Health](#).
- **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 building 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](#).