



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Experiencing Mental Exhaustion? Give Your Brain a Break Today

*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 examine some of the causes of brain fatigue and how to reclaim your brain health and performance.***

Your brain is not a muscle. But much like your biceps or hamstring, the brain burns energy when hard at work. Did you know that your brain represents 2 percent of your body weight, but is responsible for 20 percent of the energy you consume? That explains why according to Stanford professor of neurology and neurosurgery, Robert Sapolsky, chess grandmasters can burn up to 6,000 calories per day during an intense tournament just by thinking and strategizing.

And just like your body after strenuous physical activity, your brain is susceptible to fatigue from multiple sources, including overuse, chronic illness, and decreased care for brain and body. In general, mental fatigue can happen when the brain is overstimulated, is asked to sustain a high level of activity for long periods, or if the health of the brain is compromised or not properly managed.

Some examples:

- Extended hours of concentration at work or school with little time off
- Nutritional deficiency
- A considerable part of the day facing daunting responsibilities
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Devotion of large amounts of mental energy to think through problems, worries, other sources of stress
- Sleep disruption
- Environmental toxins
- Providing care for a loved one with a serious or chronic illness
- Decreased social engagement
- Too much screen time (e.g., TV, computer, phone)
- Medications

Concussion

Nature deprivation

Stroke

Post-viral infections, including PASC, which stands for post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2. A more common term is post-COVID syndrome.

The effects of mental exhaustion are wide-ranging. Some sufferers may experience “brain fog,” resulting in difficulty concentrating, taking longer to complete simple tasks, or rereading passages over and over without comprehending the meaning. More troubling effects can be irregular sleep patterns (both too little sleep and too much sleep), irritability, depression, anxiety and physical pain (muscle tension, joint and back aches, headaches and feelings of restlessness).

What should you do if you suspect you’re suffering from mental fatigue or exhaustion? The first step is to address the cause, if possible. Talk with your physician. Ask for help at work or home or try to resolve conflicts with family and friends. Also, set aside extra time for restorative sleep, aiming for between seven to eight hours of quality sleep per day. Finally, make sure you’re focusing on your basic needs, such as exercise, nutrition, positive social engagement, and spending time outside.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

It’s not always possible to avoid mental exhaustion, but the BHI offers a few suggestions for maintaining optimal brain health during times of stress:

- **USE YOUR VACATION TIME.** Take a mental health day, or a short vacation if you start to feel fatigued. It can be a great way to recharge.
- **PRACTICE SELF-CARE.** Make time in your daily schedule for rest, exercise or other activities you enjoy. It prepares you to overcome life’s difficulties.
- **SLOW DOWN WHEN YOU’RE SICK.** Rest and regain your strength if you’re suffering from either mental or physical symptoms.
- **STAY SOCIAL.** Even if those closest to you can’t help you with your problems, a good listener can be just what you need to get your worries off your chest.
- **LEARN TO USE THE WORD NO.** If you’re starting to feel overwhelmed, accepting more responsibility is not the way to go.
- **BE MINDFUL.** Be present and focus on your breathing, practice gratitude or find the positives in your situation to lower exhaustion levels.
- **GET INTO NATURE.** Going outdoors can foster creativity and concentration and reduce depression and anxiety.
- **EAT A BRAIN HEALTHY DIET.** To boost your brain health, focus on eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon. Also look for dark green leafy vegetables along with nuts, seeds, and legumes.

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), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, uses 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](#).