



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Volunteering Time and Talent Does a Body and Brain Good

*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 look at the brain health and physical benefits of volunteering.***

By the very definition of their pastime, volunteers are considered selfless individuals. They undertake difficult jobs requiring unique skills or menial tasks and ask for nothing in return. They know what Aristotle meant when he said the essence of life is “to serve others and do good.”

Of course, there are benefits to be had beyond payment. It’s almost a cliché for a valued volunteer to say, “I get more out of it than I give.” Well, research is showing that may be more than just a platitude. There are tangible benefits related to health and well-being that come along with volunteering.

For seniors, volunteer activities offer the dual benefits of getting people moving, thinking, and socializing. Volunteering has been shown to promote brain health, reducing stress and increasing positive, relaxed feelings by stimulating the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that plays a role in pleasure and learning. When volunteers learn new skills, it improves their brain performance, including memory and helps reduce risk of brain illness, including dementia by strengthening connections between parts of the brain, according to a study published in the journal Psychological Science. Quilting, sewing, gardening, cooking and photography for a cause, for example, are challenging activities that can strengthen entire networks in the brain.

A [study of adults over age 50](#) conducted by Carnegie Mellon University found that those who volunteered on a regular basis were less likely to develop high blood pressure than non-volunteers. High blood pressure is a risk factor for brain illness and contributes to heart disease, stroke, dementia and premature death.

Then there are the feel-good benefits. In 2017, VolunteerMatch released the [Doing Good is Good for You study](#), which produced the following brain health and performance findings among people who had volunteered at least once in the previous 12 months:

- 93 percent noted an improvement in mood.
- 88 percent reported improved self-esteem.
- 79 percent experienced lower stress levels.
- 78 percent reported feeling more control over their health and well-being.
- 75 percent said they felt better physically.

So get out there and make a difference in your community. You don't have to say "I get more out of it than I give." It can be our secret.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

One way to incorporate volunteering with improving brain health for everyone is to participate in Phase 2 of the BHI Brain Health Legacy Pilot Study. Beginning in the fall of 2022, BHI will seek volunteers to participate in the research. Here's what you need to know.

The Brain Health Legacy Study (Pilot Phase 2) is:

- A pilot to a multi-generational study that will follow Suncoast residents, students, visitors and workforce for decades to identify risk and protective factors associated with brain health, illness and performance at every stage of life.

The BHI Brain Health Study aims to:

- Identify risk and protective factors that help and harm brain health, including genes, lifestyle, and the environment.
- Understand how certain interventions promote brain health and reduce the risk of brain-related diseases.
- Target these interventions to key stages of life, when they will have significant and long-lasting impacts on brain health.

How you can help:

- To learn more about how you can participate in Phase 2, submit your name by sending an email to: admin@brainhealthinitiative.org.

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](#).