

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Brain Health Matters and How We Shop for Food Makes a Difference

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 fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region. Today, BHI is talking about brain healthy food shopping.

Nutrition is a core protective factor to promoting brain and body health and fighting brain and body illness. The pandemic has had an impact on many aspects of our day-to-day life, including how we shop, cook, and eat.

A recent [New York Times article](#) highlighted how our trips to the supermarket have been changed during the pandemic, and those changes aren't all bad. In fact, when it comes to shopping and eating for brain and body health, the pandemic may have had a positive impact.

According to the article, we are planning more and shopping smarter. Instead of shopping in the moment — “what am I going to cook tonight?” — we are creating lists and sticking to them. What we are buying has also changed. Sales of what supermarkets call “natural products” have skyrocketed since the beginning of the pandemic.

In Florida, we have the great advantage of having locally grown produce available year-round. Buying local has become even more popular in recent months for everything from fruits and vegetables, to dairy and eggs. Many of our local farmers are now selling directly to the consumer and farmers' markets now have an online presence making it even easier to shop for fresh, brain-healthy foods.

- Lakewood Ranch Farmer's Market, Lakewood Ranch Medical Center: <https://lakewoodranch.com/life-on-the-ranch/themarket/>
- Bradenton Farmer's Market, 400 12<sup>th</sup> St. West, Bradenton, FL 34205: <https://www.realizebradenton.com/farmers-market/>

- Sarasota Farmer’s Market, 1517 State Suite 103, Sarasota, FL 34236: <http://www.sarasotafarmersmarket.org/>
- Gamble Creek Farms, Parish <https://gamblecreekfarms.com>
- Zildjian Catering, Fresh Food to Go: <https://www.zildjancatering.com/>

Many of the changes brought about by the pandemic won’t — and shouldn’t — be permanent, but hopefully shopping and eating healthy can be a change that lasts.

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

When you are shopping, don’t forget about vitamin rich foods. A [recent study](#) from the University of Chicago suggests a link between vitamin D deficiency and the risk of developing COVID-19. Vitamin D is important for your immune system and studies show it also supports your brain health by protecting neurons, reducing inflammation, and improving your cognitive function.

Have your vitamin D level checked by your physician and increase your vitamin D levels as needed. You can support your immunity and brain health with vitamin D supplements, plenty of sunlight (easy for us Floridians), and foods rich in vitamin D like fatty fish, cheese and eggs.

The Brain Health Initiative’s nutrition advisor Dr. Uma Naidoo, Director of Nutritional & Lifestyle Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, has some advice for brain healthy shopping when you are at the grocery store or when shopping your local farmers’ markets. She recommends filling your shopping bag with brain healthy options first.

- Browse around the outer ring of the store first where fruits, vegetables, dairy, fish, meats, poultry are located.
- Consider sweet potatoes over regular potatoes as they are a more complex carb and take longer to digest. You can even make oven fries with these.
- Try roasting spaghetti squash to create a pasta alternative.
- Reach for organic canned beans (black beans, red kidney beans, cannellini, butter beans, navy beans) or the dry versions if you know how to pressure cook them.
- Frozen vegetables (preferably certified organic) with no added salt or sugar are super easy, healthy and quick to make.
- Choose fish, chicken or turkey, instead of beef.
- Frozen fruits (preferably certified organic), without added syrup are another great option if you have the freezer space.
- Select whole grain bread, brown rice, quinoa and bulgur instead of refined rice and pasta.
- Instead of choosing chips and dip, try celery, carrot or pepper strips and salsa or hummus.

And remember to adopt a brain healthier lifestyle, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and language that promote:

- 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, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI works collaboratively with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).