

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Treating High Blood Pressure is Good for 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.

High blood pressure equals high risk when it comes to brain health. It is the leading cause of stroke and can also lead to decreased cognitive performance and vascular dementia.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects nearly 30 percent of the adults in this country and the rate increases for adults over the age of 40. In addition to the well-known risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney disease, eye disease, and blood vessel damage, high blood pressure is a known risk factor for brain illness.

The heart is the pump that sends oxygen-rich blood and nutrients through our arteries to our organs and tissues. Blood pressure is the force that blood puts on the walls of our arteries as it moves through the body. It is measured in two numbers: the higher is systolic blood pressure, measured while the heart is pumping blood and the lower number, diastolic blood pressure, is recorded when the heart is relaxing and refilling with blood between beats. Normal blood pressure is a systolic rate below 120 and diastolic rate below 80, or 120/80.

In a study published last year that reviewed trials involving more than 96,000 people, researchers found that lowering high blood pressure with medication is good for the brain and the heart. A [Harvard Health](#) report of the study says participants who took one or more blood pressure drugs, such as beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, and angiotensin-receptor blockers, had a lower risk of developing dementia or cognitive impairment than the people who did not take medication.

The results of this study suggest treating high blood pressure with a combination of medication, diet and exercise can help protect our brain health, help prevent cognitive decline and reduce the risk of brain illness, including dementia.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

It's important to know your blood pressure numbers. If your blood pressure is high, here are some steps you can take to lower your numbers and protect your brain health.

- **Learn how to take your own blood pressure.** Checking your own blood pressure can be helpful if you have “white-coat syndrome,” in which your blood pressure goes up when you are visiting your doctor. Devices are available that let you check your blood pressure at home and most pharmacies also have blood pressure machines.
- **Watch your diet and hydrate well.** Eat a brain healthy diet, reduce your intake of sodium, animal fat and processed food, and make sure you eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fish. Drink water often. A good diet can lower systolic blood pressure by 10 points or more.
- **Exercise.** Moderate exercise is important to protecting your brain health and fighting brain illness, while also improving your daily brain performance. In fact, some studies have shown moderate exercise to be better for you than intense exercise.
- **Manage your weight.** Watching your diet and exercise will help you manage your weight. Losing just 20 pounds can drop your blood pressure up to 20 points.
- **Limit alcohol.** Heavy drinking increases your blood pressure so try to keep alcohol use to a brain healthy level of one to two drinks a day.
- **Avoid non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).** Long-term use of ibuprofen, naproxen, and other NSAIDs for pain relief can increase your blood pressure, especially as you age.
- **Manage stress.** Finding time to relax can help you boost your brain health and optimize your daily performance while fighting brain illness and keeping your blood pressure down.
- **Take your medication.** As the studies show, medication can help manage your blood pressure and protect your brain health. Your doctor can advise you on whether blood pressure medication may help you manage your high blood pressure.
- **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, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, 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 ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).