[IMAGE]

A Book a Day Keeps the Doctor Away?

By Ryan Keel

If you read a book today, you may live longer. Scientists have found that by simply reading every day, you can tack on almost a full two years to your life. The good news is, you don't have to read an entire book every day to reap the health benefits, either. Further good news: You can reap other health benefits, too, all from the joy of taking in a good book. Here are five health benefits you get from reading books – as if you need a reason at all!

1. Increase Your Life Span

Yes, reading a chapter a day may result in <u>a longer life</u>. The scientists mentioned above found that about half an hour per day is all it takes to reduce mortality by 17 percent. Increase your reading time to more than that and your chances of dying in the following 12-month period are even slimmer – you'll be 23 percent less likely to die in the following year.

While that's great news for bookworms, the study didn't find any evidence that reading magazines or newspapers helped prolong life expectancy. That's because book reading taps into and triggers deeper cognitive functions than article-reading.

2. Fight Alzheimer's Disease

When you read a book, you're giving your brain a little mental workout. That's exactly what you want if you are looking to ward off neurodegenerative brain diseases like Alzheimer's disease (AD). In study after study, scientists are <u>finding evidence</u> that regularly exercising your brain by engaging it in intellectually challenging activities is a good way to reduce your chances of developing AD.

3. Reduce Stress

The effects of stress on your body can be devastating. Physical symptoms like high blood pressure, stomach issues, and headaches can wreak havoc in your life, especially if you experience long-term stress.

Again, it's reading to the rescue. Reading relaxes you – and not just by a little. One study suggests reading may reduce stress by 68 percent – more than two-thirds eradication! Turns out focusing your mind on something other than your own problems provides a much-needed "escape" for your overloaded brain. And who couldn't use a bit of that?

Grab your favorite book and reap the benefits of turning the pages. And if you want to nip that stress before it becomes larger try brewing a mug of chamomile tea to reduce your stress levels.

4. Sleep Better

Now, this benefit is Pavlovian. By that, we mean when you read every night before going to sleep, your body starts to recognize the pattern and act accordingly. The body seems to say, *Oh, you're reading? Then I'll get ready to power down and go to sleep.* This may sound strange to you, but yes, it really happens, according to the Mayo Clinic.

5. Feel More Connected

It's a cold, hard fact that as colder weather creeps up, so to do the storm systems that sometimes leave us trapped in our homes with little to do. Picking up a book when the power is out and your devices have lost their charge is a fantastic way to create connection with others.

Again, reading can help with that. Research published in a 2013 issue of *Science* linked reading literary fiction to increased empathy. And we all know that when you're oozing with empathy, you're more inclined to understand the mental states of those around you. That, in turn, helps you build relationships and keep loneliness at bay.

What can we learn from all this? Your health is closely linked to the mental activity you expend when you read books. This seems to be even truer as you age. Just a half hour of reading every day and a whole smorgasbord of health benefits awaits you, not to mention the joy of discovery, the thrill of escape, and all the other mental benefits you enjoy as you flip through the pages of a great book.

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