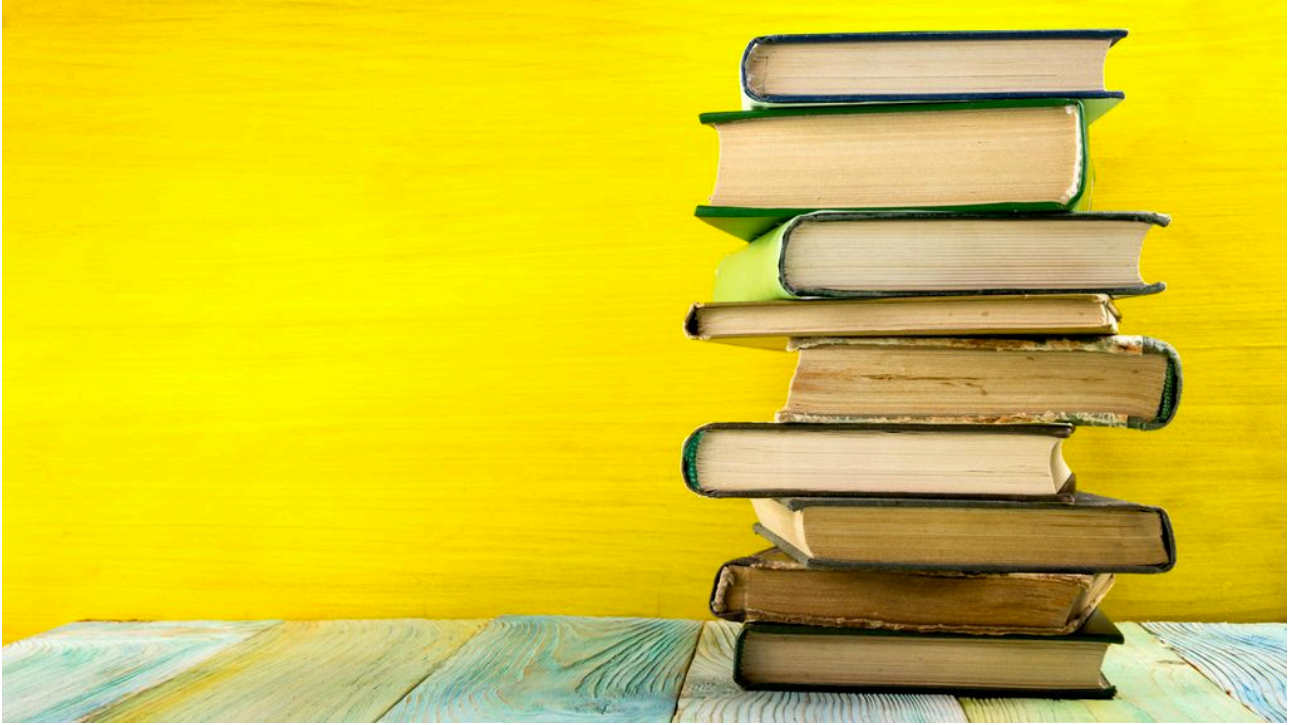


Why reading is so good for the brain

By Kimberly Gillan

Forget feeling guilty for putting your feet up with a page turner when you really should be vacuuming/working out/cooking a healthy meal.



In news not surprising for most bookworms, science shows that reading has huge psychological benefits.

Whether you're a devourer of Booker prize-winners, a self-help sponge, or a sci-fi trilogist, here's why you should prioritise your page-turning time.

Reading protects you from dementia

US dementia researchers recruited almost 300 elderly people and spent around six years collecting information from them about their engagement in cognitive activities, such as reading, throughout their life.

When the participants died, they then studied their brains and found there was a slower rate of decline in people who dedicated time throughout their lives to things like reading, writing and games.

The researchers concluded that the best advice is "a busy mind keeps dementia at bay".

Reading helps you deal with uncertainty

If you've got a lot going on in your life and feel overwhelmed by the possibilities, pick up a good piece of fiction.

The need for "cognitive closure" leads to decreased creativity and more irrational thinking but Canadian researchers found that reading a good story can help people cope better.

They gave 100 people a set of fictional short stories or factual essays to read then assessed how they felt about uncertainty. It turned out the fiction readers had less need for order and were comfortable with ambiguity – and the affect was strongest in regular readers.

"While reading, the reader can stimulate the thinking styles even of people he or she might personally dislike," the researchers wrote.

"This double release – of thinking through events without concerns for urgency and permanence, and thinking in ways that are different than one's own – may produce effects of opening the mind."

Analytical reading is particularly beneficial

While it's lovely to lose yourself in an easy paperback, if you can really give its themes some thought you will stimulate underworked parts of the brain.

That's the finding from Stanford University researchers who got a group of literary students to read a chapter of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* at a leisurely pace then read it critically while laying in an fMRI machine that measures blood flow in the brain.

They found that each style of reading lit up different parts of the brain, but the critical reading led to complex cognitive function and actually kickstarted underworked parts of the brain.

Reading builds empathy

Further fMRI research shows that when we read about characters going through an experience, the same regions of our brains light up as if we were experiencing the situation ourselves.

Given that psychologists say that people who have high levels of empathy generally have larger social circles and report more satisfying relationships – practising our empathetic brain muscle seems like a wise move.

Reading busts stress

You might not feel like you have time to kick back with a book when you're under intense stress, but University of Sussex researchers found that reading can reduce stress by as much as 68 percent, which they say is thanks to the fact that you can immerse yourself in a world that's free of what's bugging you.

According to the New Yorker, reading can also act as a form of meditation.

"Reading has been shown to put our brains into a pleasurable trance-like state, similar to meditation, and it brings the same health benefits of deep relaxation and inner calm," Ceridwen Dovey writes.

"Regular readers sleep better, have lower stress levels, higher self-esteem, and lower rates of depression than non-readers."

If that doesn't prompt you to pick up a good book, we don't know what will.

Source; <http://coach.nine.com.au/2017/02/27/09/32/reading-isfundamental?app=applenews#DAxx0lgV2fxF8Jja.99>