

As you may have guessed, I am an avid reader and a huge advocate of reading to children. The last time I composed a column about reading (January, 2014), I shared some reasons reading to children is beneficial. This time, I wanted to share why reading is beneficial for ALL ages.

- 1) **Reading reduces stress.** According to a study conducted by Mindlab International at Sussex University, reading is the most effective strategy a person can use to reduce stress. Dr. David Lewis, a cognitive neuropsychologist with the University found that reading reduced stress by 68% compared to listening to music (61%), having a cup of coffee or tea (54%), taking a walk (42%), or playing video games (21%.) Dr. Lewis, who conducted the test, found that test participants needed to read only 6 minutes to slow down heart rate and reduce the tension in their muscles. In fact, the results of the test proved that reading reduced stress levels to lower than before the subjects had started reading. Results of the experiment showed that it doesn't matter what type of book is read as long as the reader fully engages in reading and allows themselves to escape their surroundings, if only for a short amount of time.
- 2) **Reading enhances memory.** A study published in Neurology, the journal of the American Association of Neurology, reported that a study of 294 seniors showed that those who participated in cognitively engaging activities throughout their life, such as reading, experienced a slower rate of memory decline than those who had not. Reading helps exercise your memory. You have to remember what happened in previous paragraphs or chapters in order to keep the story connected. Thus, your short-term recall is enhanced – a benefit that transfers to everyday living, such as remembering where you need to stop for various errands. Much like lifting weights can build your body's muscles, reading strengthen the brain's neural network making your mind more receptive to memory retention and learning new things.
- 3) **Reading sharpens your decision-making skills.** The more cognitive processing you do each day, the more you improve your fluid intelligence – an ability known to decline throughout adulthood. Regardless of your age, the more you do to challenge your brain through such activities as reading, the more likely you are to retain your fluid intelligence - the ability to reason quickly and to think abstractly.
- 4) **Reading delays the onset of Alzheimer's and dementia.** A recent study conducted on seniors in their 70's who engaged in mentally intense hobbies such

as reading, from ages 20-60 showed that they were less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease. Dr. Zaven Khachaturian, a prominent researcher in the field of Alzheimer's disease and senior science advisor to the Alzheimer's Association, explains that mental hobbies are one way adults can reduce the risk of Alzheimer's Disease. "Intellectual activities seemed particularly protective," he said, noting that "those whose leisure centered on mind-challenging hobbies were about 2.5 times less likely to develop Alzheimer's."

- 5) **Reading can help you sleep better.** A longtime strategy for helping you fall asleep, reading creates a bedtime ritual signaling the body that it's time for sleep. In their online resources, the Mayo Clinic offers reading as one of many rituals you can use to help your body recognize the signal for sleep. This is a much better alternative to watching television or using other electronic devices which have been proven to delay the onset of sleep. Combined with the other benefits cited in this article, bedtime reading has multiple advantages for our body and brain combined!

So now what? How do you find "a good read" that will keep you interested while your brain and body reaps the benefits? The Dorothy Bramlage Public Library has a variety of lists that provide book titles based on the topics and genre you prefer to read. They also have library staff that can provide personal assistance as you peruse the bookshelves in search of the perfect read! You also have access to some comfortable and quiet seating areas so that you can get started on your book before you even leave the library. If you haven't been to your local public library, you are really missing out on a great opportunity!

Another resource you could use can be found online: <http://www.goodreads.com/choiceawards/best-books-2014>

At this website you will find the *goodreads Choice Awards* listed for each year back to 2009. There are multiple reading genres to select from as readers have posted their preferences to the website. The site rates books based on the number of reader's votes they get. Here are the top 3 listed for the 2014 Choice Awards in some of my favorite genres (I like almost any genre, as long as it is well-written!)

Fiction: Landline, by Rainbow Rowell; Big Little Lies, by Liane Moriarty; The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry, by Gabrielle Zevin.

Mystery & Thriller: Mr. Mercedes, by Stephen King; The Silkworm, by Robert Galbraith; and The Thousand Dollar Tan Line, by Veronica Mars.

Historical Fiction: All the Light We Cannot See, by Anthony Doerr; The Invention of Wings, by Sue Monk Kidd; and Edge of Eternity, by Ken Follett. I have read the third one and the other two that go with the trilogy– an exceptional read!

Reading is relaxing, fun and provides a wide range of benefits for all ages. Take some time every day to pick up a good book and relax! For more information about health and wellness, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!