

# Avid Readers Appear to Live Longer

*By Paige Towers • August 4, 2016 at 5:20pm*

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When you're having an I don't care about being healthy day, the type of day when all you want to do is pick up a half dozen cupcakes from the local bakery "for a party" (they're all for you) and then proceed to eat them in front of the TV, the last thing you want to see as you're walking home is some chump in the gym sweating it out on an exercise bike, right? Wrong. The last thing you want to see is that chump on the exercise bike sweating it out whilst reading a book at the same time.

Why? Because that chump might be outliving you; in fact, that chump might outlive us all.

*In a study published in Social Science & Medicine,*

researchers from Yale University School of Public Health noted an association between book reading and longevity. Meaning? It may not just be things like exercise and genetics and sleep and, you know, not slaying frosted baked goods, that help push your ageometer up on the scales. Rather, it may also mean trading

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in TV time for pageturning time. By looking at data on 3,635 people over the age of 50 who had previously answered survey questions regarding their reading habits, the researchers found that people who regularly read books have longer life expectancies than those who don't.

**According to their results, book readers, overall, live an average of nearly two years longer than those who don't read at all.**

In fact, those who selfreported that they read books up to three and a half hours a week (the time it takes to watch approximately nine and a half episodes of "Friends," mind you) were overall 17 percent less likely to die over the next 12 years compared to those who didn't read books at all. And those who read than three and a half hours a week were 23 percent less likely to die during those following dozen years.

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Even once researchers adjusted for the confounders of age, gender, race, education, the presence of diseases, selfrated health, wealth, marital status and depression, the difference found was still significant. According to their results, book readers, overall, live an average of nearly two years longer than those who don't read at all.

*Shutter stock*

Avni Bavishi, the Master's student at Yale who headed up the research, wrote in an email that she was inspired to follow this line of research because she has “seen that people often read less as they age.” Interestingly, the question of people were reading turned out to be just as important: the association between higher life expectancy and those who read newspapers or periodicals was still present, but not nearly as strong as those who stated that they spent those hours immersed in a book.

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The researchers aren't sure why picking up actual books instead of, say, *Us Weekly*

could make a difference in life expectancy. Yet, they theorize in the study that reading books could lead to a “survival advantage” as reading a book is a slower, more immersive process in which a reader has to draw connections with the outside world. (Also, reading a little less about Kim K. seems like a survival advantage in itself.)

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Furthermore, as stated in the study, “cognitive engagement may explain why vocabulary, reasoning, concentration and critical thinking skills are improved by exposure to books.” Books — particularly of the fiction variety —

can also promote empathy and emotional intelligence,

which can potentially, maybe, possibly lead to a longer life

.

This is where we should hold up for a moment. Before you go dashing off to the bookstore or library — cupcake wrappers trailing behind you — remember that there are factors here that could be at play. For instance, the researchers didn't have any data on how long those surveyed had been reading books for. Conceivably, whether people have been reading books for their entire lives or for, you know, two months prior to taking the survey could potentially affect the data. (Not to mention \*ahem\* people's sleep patterns.)

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Now that that's been said, go ahead and continue on your way out the door, because most of us can agree that books are freaking awesome, whether reading them might actually help you live longer or not.

As Bavishi wrote, "Reading doesn't have to be a massive commitment, as any level of reading books could potentially extend your life. Reading a chapter every night of a novel is a great way to unwind and benefit your health."

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