

How and why to keep reading as you age



Reading improves your brain health and mental health. It also helps your social and communication skills.

But there are many things that can get in the way of continuing to read as you age. For example, arthritis or deteriorating vision can make it difficult to hold and read a book.

It's still possible to make avid reading part of your healthy ageing journey. Here's why you should, and some tips as to how you can.

Why should you keep reading as you age?



Reading for your health

Research indicates that reading [increases your lifespan](#).

Books are best for this, but they aren't the only beneficial form of reading. Reading anything from newspapers to blog posts can help you [keep learning as you age](#), which is important to your brain health.

We know that reading involves [a complex neural network of activity](#). So, calming as it can be, it's still an exercise for your brain. And you can use it to keep your brain in good shape.

Taking time to read at least once a week is associated with [slower decline of thinking skills](#).

Building your cognitive reserve

[Cognitive reserve](#) is the idea that you can build a stockpile of thinking abilities throughout your life. This stockpile would then give you more resilient thinking skills through ageing and disease.

Frequent mental exercise could even make you less likely to develop [dementia](#). A [2013 study](#) found it makes you less likely to develop the plaques and tangles found in the brains of people with dementia.

Like training your body to build strength, you can train your brain for old age. You can start any time, but the earlier the better. And reading for leisure is a good way to begin.

Reading for mental health

Reading fiction is also associated with [greater social and empathic abilities](#). It makes it easier to understand the minds of others. It also improves your vocabulary, allowing you to communicate better. All this aids in building social relationships.

You might make friends in a book club at your [local library](#). It's a great way of [keeping connected with your community](#), which is crucial to your mental health.

Reading is also a helpful wind-down activity for your [sleep routine](#), due to its relaxing effect. Half an hour of reading has been found to lower blood pressure, heart rate, and feelings of distress. It was [observed to be just as effective for stress management as yoga or humour](#).

So, how can you keep reading as you age?

Go easy on your eyes

Keeping on top of your [eye health](#) is one of the first things you can do.

The best medicine is preventative medicine.

Get regular checkups. Protect your eyes from the sun and bright lights. Wear your glasses if they've been prescribed to you. And be kind to your eyes by using the appropriate lighting for whatever you're doing.



Assistive products for reading

What if you have low vision? Or difficulty reading due to conditions such as dyslexia? Consider [assistive products](#) that could help you.

There are magnifiers to alleviate eyestrain. You can get many books in large print as well. Or consider C-pen readers that can scan text and read it aloud to you.

Need the option to read hands-free or with one hand? You can look into book stands that will hold your page open for you.

You can also borrow from the free library of [Braille House](#). They can send braille books to you via free post, in bags with reversible address labels.

Reading with your ears

There's also the option of listening to audiobooks. This is believed to [trigger similar activity in the brain to what reading triggers](#), according to Brigid Magner (RMIT University).

Magner also points out the significance of spoken stories in Australia. Consider [Songlines](#). This is a First Nations oral tradition, mapping the stars and land from ancient stories.

Spoken-word storytelling is a rich tradition. People have been doing it since long before print books existed.

The convenience of listening

Audiobooks are easy to access and may even revolutionise your downtime.

You can get started borrowing audiobooks via the BorrowBox app. This is free to use through your local library. Just have your library card number and PIN ready.

And reading with your ears allows you to do other things while you read. Exercise your mind and body both; listen to a book while you go for a walk, finish up a knitting project, or make a cup of tea. The convenience of it will have you finishing books in no time.

Here are some [helpful products for craft activities](#) to do while you read.

Train your memory

After finding the tools you need to read, you may find that some books challenge your memory skills.

It might help if you select books with fewer characters to follow. You could also make a habit of writing down the names of characters as they're introduced.

Maybe you're reading about a topic that interests you and want to be sure to remember what you learn. It can be helpful to take notes as you go. Or take a moment at the end of each chapter to recall its key points.

Another great way to remember what you've been reading is to tell people about it. Better yet, discuss it in your book club!

More helpful information

If you need more information, take the [LiveUp quiz](#) or get in touch with one of our helpful team on **1800 951 971**.

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