



READING FOR RELAXATION

Unwinding with a good book is a hobby many of us enjoy, but perhaps we take for granted how much it can contribute to our wellbeing. In a busy world full of technology and distractions, reading can help us to reduce stress, understand life, and see our problems in a different light.

About two-thirds of the UK population read books for pleasure. It's a hobby that research has linked to improvements in our mood, and a greater sense of community and empathy for others.

If you're one of these many bookworms, like I am, you probably know that feeling of becoming completely immersed in a book to the point where you block out everything else. Your mind becomes focused and any worries you had fade out.

Even reading for a few minutes when you feel stressed might give you the time-out you need to feel better. Meera Phull, a Mental Wellbeing Nurse at Bupa, says: "Reading offers such a wonderful opportunity for escapism, to broaden the imagination and to keep our minds active and learning. I like to have two books on the go at any time. I have one that is informative and motivating, and one that is pure leisure reading and helps me switch off and relax."

Fitting reading into your day

Where and when do you like to read? There are lots of points in the day when you might fit in a few pages. I spend a couple of hours a day on trains as part of my commute and becoming absorbed in a good book always feels like a valuable way to use that time.

Many people find their reading time at home, like my colleague Natalie. She says: "For me, reading represents escape and cosiness. I like settling down on a rainy afternoon with a book, a cup of tea and a blanket, and letting myself get lost in another world. I really like stories about everyday lives. I find that reading novels about different people and the scrapes they get themselves in to helps me understand the world a bit more. And I love meeting a character that makes me laugh and who I can relate to."

Bedtime is one of the most popular times to read, and four in 10 readers say reading helps them to sleep better. Reading a book could be an important part of your pre-bedtime routine.

Reading and different life situations

Reading can be helpful for people in all kinds of life circumstances. When parents read books to their children, it can have psychological and social benefits for both of them, a review of studies covering over 3,000 families found. And for older people, evidence suggests that reading books can be a successful way to prevent feelings of loneliness. Reading as you age may also be an important way to keep your brain active and engaged.

If you're dealing with a particular health problem, reading certain books may help you to understand and cope with the situation. Reading Well Books on Prescription is run in association with local libraries. It's a scheme where you can look for expert-approved books to help with everything from mental health problems to long-term conditions. As another example, here at Bupa we have a list of books about dementia that could help people diagnosed with dementia or their carers.

Making the time to read

Would you like to read more? One of the barriers to spending time reading might be feeling too busy to pick up a book. A way to overcome this could be to set yourself a goal and commit to making reading part of your schedule.

I also think it's important to be honest with yourself about what books you genuinely enjoy, rather than forcing yourself through books that you find hard-going. That way, you'll naturally feel more inclined to read more, as you'll look forward to discovering where the next few pages will take you.

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