

Health Alert — Read to Save Your Life

Friday, April 3, 2009

We are constantly bombarded with health messages these days, with many offering confusing, complicated, or contradictory advice. There are so many messages with so many misunderstandings that, in the end, they have become like car alarms going off in the parking lot. They are heard now as a noisy nuisance.

Well, here is a health alert we can all understand. Researchers at the University of Sussex have determined that the very best way to relieve stress, both physical and mental, is to read a book. Got your attention?

As reported in *The Telegraph*, the researchers found that stress levels and heart rate showed a 68% reduction in measurable stress after reading from a book. After achieving a high stress level through exercise and mental tests, just six minutes of reading slowed the heart rate and decreased other measures of physical stress in the muscles. Reading reduced stress to levels even lower than the baseline before the high stress was reached.

Other stress relievers included listening to music (61% reduction), having a cup of tea or coffee (54% reduction), and taking a walk (42% reduction). Playing video games lowered stress rates by only 21%, but left heart rates racing.

Dr. David Lewis, who directed the study for Mindlab International at the University of Sussex, said, “Losing yourself in a book is the ultimate relaxation.”

As the paper reported, “Psychologists believe this is because the human mind has to concentrate on reading and the distraction of being taken into a literary world eases the tensions in muscles and the heart.”

Dr. Lewis explained this in greater detail:

“It really doesn’t matter what book you read, by losing yourself in a thoroughly engrossing book you can escape from the worries and stresses of the everyday world and spend a while exploring the domain of the author’s imagination.

“This is more than merely a distraction but an active engaging of the imagination as the words on the printed page stimulate your creativity and cause you to enter what is essentially an altered state of consciousness.”

This is a helpful (if non-poetic) description of the experience of reading. The power of words on the page is incredible. The experience of reading requires mental attention and the investment of imagination. Creativity characterizes the reading mind, because reading brings a constant flow of ideas, thoughts, impressions, suggestions, and mental images.

No other experience brings the same ability to transport the imagination and to transfer ideas. Those who would lead, must read. Those who would learn, must learn to be avid and skilled readers.



Now we have even more reason to read books — and to advocate libraries, reading, and the literary experience. Who knew that reading was good for your health? Of course, reading is even more closely linked to mental development, intellectual growth, and, as reading Christians know, spiritual growth as well.

Pay close attention to this new study. The life you save may be your own.

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.