



Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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The importance of reading to your child

Children are born with a love of language. They learn words by listening to you and mimicking what you say, right from their earliest days.

With Alberta schools closed until the fall and many childcare services yet to re-open, reading is a reassuring daily ritual for children. And it can be a calming stress-reducer for moms, dads and caregivers as well.

Talking, singing and reading to your child builds their vocabulary and their talking and listening skills. Reading every day with your child helps their brains develop and strengthens family bonds.

“Research indicates that reading aloud is one of the most important things you can do to help a child prepare for reading and learning,” says Farah Bandali, a director with Alberta Health Services’ Healthy Living team.

“Learning to read is the key to learning in general. The benefits include brain development, better concentration and cognitive skills and more self-confidence for your child. It truly sets them up to succeed.”

Parents are the First Teachers

As a parent, you are your child’s first (and most important) teacher. You have the power to shape a love for learning that fuels their later success in school and life.

“Reading aloud to your child has proven cognitive benefits for comprehending stories, understanding words, and developing visual imagery,” says Krista Dumba of AHS. She's a health promotion facilitator with the Provincial Addiction and Mental Health team in Calgary.

“Reading also helps their social and emotional growth,” adds Dumba. “Early on, the pictures and stories you share together will help your child learn words to describe their experiences and feelings. This helps them say what they feel rather than act out how they feel.”

Avoid a Pandemic Lag

Reading offers many others benefits. It opens doors to new worlds, new ideas and new opportunities to grow.

For school-age kids, continuing to read during COVID-19 ensures they improve or maintain the skill. For example, children who do not read over summer holidays can lose some of their reading and literacy skills.

Reading for as little as 15 minutes a few nights a week helps a child keep their reading skills. And it can be fun and easy. Listen to audiobooks during a long drive. Have children make up and tell stories anytime. Older children may like to read and talk about a novel with a parent.

You can also find many online resources that promote and build reading skills. We recommend:

- Edmonton’s [Centre for Family Literacy](#) has four to five programs a day on weekdays
- High River’s [Literacy for Life Foundation](#) offers low-cost literacy programs, including a series on rhythm and rhyme
- Find practical tips and advice for building a love of lifelong reading at [Calgary Reads](#).

For information about healthy living for families during COVID-19, visit ahs.ca/healthytogether.