Read out loud – it's good for you

HEALTH Reading aloud reduces stress, improves memory, and strengthens social connection

mit Audiodatei und Übungsmaterial

BY FRANZISKA LANGE

PHOTO: Getty Images

1 Sometimes we read out a funny email to make others laugh, or we slowly say the instructions of a recipe out loud to make sense of them. But most of the time, we read silently for ourselves. That's too bad, because research shows the health benefits of reading aloud are very good indeed.

2 Study after study has shown that reading reduces stress. According to research from the University of Sussex, reading for just six minutes lowers stress levels by 68 per cent among adults. That's not surprising, because reading engages us so much we forget our worries. And reading al[illegible] can make that effect even stronger.

3 Reading aloud requires focus. You have to concentrate on speaking the words, and doing so diverts your attention away from your stress and problems. The soothing tone of voice people often use when they read aloud also has a calming effect, both on the reader and on those who listen.

4 Reading aloud also improves your memory. Colin MacLeod, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo in Canada, has shown that people of all ages remember words better if they read them aloud than if they just read them silently.

5 In one study, a group of 7- to 10-year-olds were shown a list of w[illegible]s and asked to read some of those words aloud, others silently. Afterwards, they recognised 87 per cent of the words they had read aloud, but only 70 per cent of those they had read silently.

6 Adults aged 67 to 88 in a similar study were almost three times more likely to recall words they had read aloud than ones they had read silently.

7 MacLeod thinks saying words aloud made people remember them better. He calls this the "production effect": saying the words improves your memory of them.

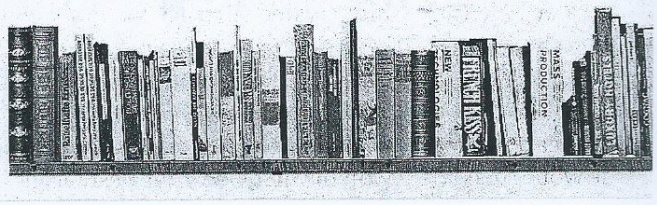
8 The production effect is strongest when we read aloud ourselves. However, it can also benefit listeners' memory. In a study done by researchers from the University of Perugia in Italy, adults with dementia who had been read to did better in memory tests.

9 Experts even say reading aloud boosts your brain power because it activates several cognitive functions. Not only do you use those parts of the brain that are involved in reading; you also activate the brain's centre of speech because you have to say words out loud and pronounce them correctly.

10 Focusing on the pronunciation of words and their meaning at the same time makes reading aloud something like a cognitive workout.

11 Reading aloud can also help you feel connected with others. Being absorbed in the same story at the same time creates a shared experience. And when it's done in a group, reading aloud can bring people together. Building social connections is a good way of coping with stress, which, in turn, is good for your health.

12 On the listeners' s[illegible] read to can make you [illegible] and appreciated beca[illegible] one is taking the time [illegible] you.

13 Sam Duncan, an [illegible]eracy researcher at [illegible] College London, say[illegible] someone is reading c[illegible] you, you feel a bit l[illegible] been given a gift of th[illegible] their attention, of the [illegible]

14 So next time you [illegible] thing worth sharing w[illegible] don't just send them [illegible] lend them the book. [illegible] them.