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Why book clubs help you live longer

Being a member of a reading group may extend your life, according to a new study. Great – but which books should you read?

 Chapter and converse: people enjoy healthier lives if they maintain social bonds after they retire

**Name:**Book clubs.

**Age:** Nothing but a number.

**Appearance:** The very elixir of eternal life.

**Really?** **Book clubs make you live for ever?**Well, no. But they might make you live a little longer.

**Because in my friend’s book club, everybody drinks enough wine to fell an elephant.** It’s only true if you’re part of a certain demographic.

**Explain yourself.** [According to results published this week in BMJ Open](http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/2/e010164.full?sid=8cb77b19-ec32-4851-ae68-b533dc25294a), a UK medical journal, people enjoy healthier lives if they maintain social bonds after they retire. Something like a book club, where you regularly meet friends and chat, can significantly reduce your risk of death in the first six years post-retirement.

**So it’s the social interaction that keeps you alive, not the book club itself?**That’s right. You could also be a member of a sporting club or a church society.

**So I wouldn’t actually have to read the books?** I suppose not. Like you said, it’s the social interaction that counts.

**So I could just memorise the book’s Wikipedia summary on the way there and I’d still live longer?** Listen, I’m not really sure you’re fully grasping the point …

**I hate books.** You’re weird.

**How else can I live longer?** Well, the study is all about the negative effects of social isolation in the elderly, and how it can increase the risk of dementia or cognitive decline. And one thing that can stop social isolation is …

**Don’t say it.** Formal employment.

**Goddamn it.**Sorry.

**So that’s my choice, then? Work for ever or read boring books?** No, that isn’t your choice at all. If you’ve just retired, you should try to remain as active as you possibly can. Maintaining strong social relationships with likeminded people is important for your health, but you can achieve this in a number of ways. It doesn’t have to be a book club.

**What about if I started an I Hate Books club?**I suppose that could also work, if you found enough people to join.

**I definitely would. Books are idiots.** Maybe you should just go and have a lie down.

**Do say:** “In today’s book club, we’re discussing A Short Guide to a Long Life by David B Agus.”

**Don’t say:** “And don’t forget that next week’s book is Swimming in a Sea of Death by David Rieff.”