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up front

IN BRIEF

News, studies, and recent research



Reading books can prolong your life, according to findings in *Social Science and Medicine*. Yale University School of Public Health researchers studied 3,635 people aged 50 and older and found that overall, book readers experienced a 20 percent reduction in risk of mortality over 12 years of follow-up compared with non-book readers. Reading books also offers a greater survival advantage than reading newspapers or magazines.

American consumers throw out nearly 80 billion pounds of food annually, representing a significant contribution to landfills and greenhouse gas emissions. Researchers at Ohio State University believe that number can be reduced. They say that “use by” dates are confusing and inaccurate and that standardized dates are needed. Of 500 people surveyed, 68 percent believe that throwing out food after the “use by/sell by” date reduces the chance of foodborne illness, while 77 percent feel guilty about tossing out food.

Parents are happier in nations with family-friendly policies, especially low-cost child care and generous paid vacation and sick leave. And those policies, according to a study of 22 nations in the *American Journal of Sociology*, make non-parents happier, too. Parental happiness varies globally; past surveys have shown that U.S. parents are less happy than U.S. non-parents. Parents in nations with more generous family policies, such as Norway and Hungary, report greater happiness levels than non-parents. Strong family policies reduce parenthood stress, particularly combining work and child care duties.

Barnyard dust in Amish homes stimulates children’s immune systems and protects against asthma, according to findings in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Researchers studied 60 children in Hutterite and Amish farm communities with similar genetic ancestry. Hutterites use modern machinery on large farms, while Amish live on single-family farms, close to their barns, with children spending more time in the barns than Hutterites. Amish house dust was rich in bacterial debris that Hutterite dust lacked. About 5 percent of Amish children (ages 6-14) have asthma – half the U.S. average and one-fourth the Hutterite average.

—ANNE STEIN