

# Read to Your Baby: Doctor's Orders

~ reading as preventive medicine ~

"When parents read to their children, they're practicing preventive medicine," says Calgary pediatrician Dr. Peter Nieman, principal author of *Promoting Literacy in the Physician's Office*, a Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) position statement. "If parents expose their children to books at an early age, they can greatly decrease that child's chances of developing a low self-esteem, engaging in delinquency or substance abuse, and of becoming economically disadvantaged later in life."



Between 5% and 10% of school-aged children are at below-average reading levels. The first three to four years of a child's life are the most crucial in developing their literacy skills. Therefore, physicians — pediatricians in particular — are in an ideal position to encourage parents to read to their children and help develop their literacy skills.

## Tips from the Canadian Pediatric Society

- ~ Read to your child: Even very young babies are fascinated by books. Toddlers can name what they see in picture books. They like rhymes and short stories.
- ~ Read with children: Children who learn to read need to practice this new skill. If they are doing well, nightly home reading is a chance to show off. If they are having trouble, reading at home with adults provides a safe place to practice.
- ~ Even when your children can read alone, continue to read out loud with them.
- ~ When you are helping a child read, focus on meaning. Reading well is about understanding meaning, and not just knowing how to say the words. If your child is stuck on a word, don't just 'sound it out.' Help your child figure out the word from the context of the rest of the passage or the pictures.
- ~ Give your child a choice among books. Though children may not like to be told what to read, they may not make good choices if left completely on their own.
- ~ Ask the experts for help! Teachers and librarians are good sources of advice for choosing books that are appropriate for your child's age and reading level.



More information: [cps.ca/issues-questions/literacy](https://cps.ca/issues-questions/literacy)

