



# Read Your Way to Wellness and Vacation with Books

by GAIL CARROLL

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**“The more that you read, the more things you will know.  
The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go!” ~ Dr. Seuss**

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As summer approaches and you begin planning your vacation, the excitement builds. What will you do this summer vacation? Whether it's an exotic vacation away, local travel or a staycation in your beautiful backyard, consider the many benefits reading can offer. (Especially if you are staying home and long to go somewhere else.) Take a vacation through books. Read your way through Italy with *Juliet* by Anne Fortier, explore new cultures with books like *Secret Daughter* by Shilpi Somaya Gowda and *Birdie* by Tracey Lindberg.

Of all of the things you can do to promote better health, reading has so many benefits:

- **Relaxation.** After a busy year and the stressors with doing so much in such a compressed time frame, reading can help you unwind. It can offer respite and relaxation. Because our jobs often require us to read work-related materials and we are often reading on a screen, research suggests that holding a book in your hand and actually turning the pages can slow you down.
- **Brain Gym.** Reading a book is like exercise for your brain. It boosts your brain power.
- **Promote Better Relations.** Did you know that reading can increase your capacity for empathy? According to a study at Carnegie Mellon University, getting lost in a book can help you better relate to others ([www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201412/can-reading-fictional-story-make-you-more-empathetic](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201412/can-reading-fictional-story-make-you-more-empathetic)). Maya Angelou says that reading fiction can better help you both understand emotions and learn to read others' emotions.
- **Improve Memory.** Did you know that turning pages can actually help you remember what you are reading? The feel of pages under your fingertips provides your brain with some context which can lead to better comprehension of what you are reading.

- **Reduce Disease Risk.** Reading can reduce your risk of Alzheimer Disease. ([www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201412/can-reading-fictional-story-make-you-more-empathetic](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201412/can-reading-fictional-story-make-you-more-empathetic))

- **Reduce Stress and Increase Happiness.** Reading can help you relax, reduce your stress and increase your happiness. In 2009, Sussex University conducted a research study that showed reading can reduce stress by up to 68% “...losing yourself in a thoroughly engrossing book you can escape from your worries and stresses of the everyday world...” ~ David Lewis, neuropsychologist ([www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/5070874/Reading-can-help-reduce-stress.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/5070874/Reading-can-help-reduce-stress.html)) Snuggle up with a wonderful book, a favorite chair and/or blanket, a cup of tea or a glass of wine and escape.

- **Promote Better Sleep.** According to the Mayo Clinic, reading before bed can help you sleep. Make it a part of your bedtime ritual. Having a ritual before bed like dimming the lights, a warm drink, soft music and a little reading can signal the body that you are winding down and getting ready to go to sleep. Handheld paper books are encouraged over digital reading since blue light technology can interfere with sleep as it actually signals your body to wake up. ([www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379))

- **Encourage Life-long Learning and Growth.** Start a virus – a reading virus that is. Reading can be contagious. A great virus to catch. Start your children off when they are young with bedtime stories. According to Scholastic, this will encourage them to become readers. ([www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading](http://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading)) This is a virus that is fun. There is nothing like catching the reading bug. It will fuel your conversations for a lifetime.

- **Engage in Fitness with Longer Duration.** If you

are walking on a treadmill or working out on a stationary bicycle, consider reading. It may actually keep you invested in the activity for a longer period than if you were just engaged in the activity itself.

- **Increase Vocabulary.** Word power. Keep a dictionary handy as reading can increase your vocabulary. How often have you read a book and found new words you hadn't heard before? Keep your eyes open for new words and possible vocabulary increases the next time you pick up a good book.

- **Inspire and Encourage Goals.** Reading may inspire goals. When you read a book where a character is trying to accomplish something or makes a change in their life, the story can inspire or encourage you to create and/or complete life goals.

- **Achieve a Natural High.** Reading can make you high. What a great way to lift your spirit. Sometimes a book can be so beautiful, inspiring or even downright funny that it can lift our own spirits and even improve our mood.

- **Save Money.** An economical form of entertainment. Cheaper than the movies or the theatre. Go on – explore your local library ([www.nlpl.ca](http://www.nlpl.ca)). There is so much there.

- **Travel the World.** Travel the world through books. Reading helps you explore and understand other cultures as well as takes you on a journey through history.

- **Be a Better Problem Solver.** Reading can help you problem solve. Sometimes we try so hard to solve a problem that it seems the more effort we put in to thinking about it and trying to resolve it, the further away from an answer we move. Try not thinking about it for a little while. Sometimes when reading for pleasure an answer just comes to us or a character or situation in a book provides us with a sense of direction.

- **Builds Better Self-esteem.** Did you know that by becoming well-informed on a variety of topics you can increase your feelings of self-esteem and self-worth?

- **Provides Respite.** Reading can take your mind off your troubles and provide you with respite.

- **Lifelong Friendship and Better Socialization Skills.** You will never be lonely when you have a book for a friend. It will always give you something to talk about. It makes socialization easier and fun.

- **Helps You Find Creative Ways to Celebrate and Enjoy Life.** Have a party around books. Invite your friends and exchange reading lists or choose a book and have a theme party around it. A number of years ago a group of friends read Hannah Tuncliffe's *The Color of Tea*, about a woman who settles with her husband in a new country and she opens a beautiful

bakery dedicated to French macaroons. We hosted a party with several tasty colored macaroons and teas. A fun evening full of laughter and recipe ideas, along with lots of book chit chat. Create a couples reading group to build friendship and intimacy. A great way to celebrate getting together. Prepare food and drink around the theme of your book if it is suitable. Find ways to celebrate reading, friendship and fun.

“Great books help you understand and they help you feel understood.” ~ John Green author of *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska* and other great novels.

With all these wonderful benefits of books and reading in mind I have decided to share with you my own summer reading list for this year. Every year I look forward to two things: CBC Reads Battle of the Books in March month and Harper Collins 50 Book Pledge. For those of you who are not familiar with the 50 Book Pledge, visit [www.50bookpledge.ca](http://www.50bookpledge.ca). Wishing you all a very happy, restful and fun summer.

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## Top Ten Summer Reading Recommendations

1. *Secret Daughter* by Shilpi Somaya Gowda
2. *The Golden Son* by Shilpi Somaya Gowda
3. *Orphan Train* by Christine Baker Kline
4. *Lilac Girls* by Martha Hall Kelly
5. *The Piano Maker* by Kurt Paka
6. *Bone and Bread* by Saleema Nawaz
7. *The Hero's Walk* by Anita Rau Badami
8. *Minister Without Portfolio* by Michael Winter
9. *Birdie* by Tracey Lindberg
10. *The Illegal* by Lawrence Hill

*Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest counsellors and the most patient teachers.*

~ Charles William Elst