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Living Well.

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Relate Well.

summerreading

Facts.

The season offers neverending selection of stories for all ages

Maternity leave and breastfeeding

A recent study found, out of a national sample of mothers, women who took at least 13 weeks of total maternity leave had the highest rate of breastfeeding initiation, at 74.2 percent. Women who took one to six weeks of leave had the lowest rate, at 64.6 percent. Women returning to work after 13 weeks had the highest proportion of predominant breastfeeding beyond three months, while those returning within one to six weeks had the lowest proportion. Study authors conclude that if new mothers delay their time of return to work, they may breastfeed for a longer period of time.

Karin Wood
Special to Living Well

Summer reading — what possibilities for all ages! Every local library has a delightful summer children's reading program with a theme. The Fall River Public Library theme this summer is "Happily Ever After!" A kick-off celebration begins July 12 at the library and the program involves early readers, babies to be read to and school age children. But why is reading and children so important? The University of Oregon's latest research on children's brains and the effect of experience on brain development gives three reasons

why. The first is brain plasticity and the sensitive time periods of a developing brain, when a good healthy brain foundation takes place. After all, a 2-year-old child has twice (about 2 billion) the number of brain cells as their adult parent. So what gets used and what gets lost as the child grows? Experience will influence what connections stay.

The second reason to encourage an early reading experience is based on "acquisition." The brain is important for everything we know, we do and we feel. Experience is what initiates brain growth and shapes what connections get devel-



oped. Beginning with the experience of being read to, being listened to, being talked to with encouraging words helps children acquire a life-long skill of language skills.

Third is practice, because reading skills don't come naturally. Just learning the process of reading involves three separate regions of the brain; one involves sounds, another stores patterns and the third maps letters. Those three regions need experience and practice to communicate with one another and learn to work together. The readiness to read takes time to develop.

Rhyming games, singing nursery tunes, reading aloud, playing word games, asking about letter sounds are ways parents can help young children with reading readiness and readiness for school. The Fall River School's Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Program, which supports the transition to kindergarten for young children in Fall River, is a participant in the library's summer reading calendar.

Nurture your family this summer with a good long reading experience, with time to talk, by sharing new ideas and experiences through books. If "Over in the Meadow" is one of your child's favorite nursery rhymes, join the several kayaking opportunities being offered in our area. The Trustees of Reservation (www.thetrustees.org) is

offering a tour each month in the summer among some of the smaller river tributaries for families with children over five years of age. The Taunton River Watershed Alliance (www.trwa.org) is also

having a river paddle, suitable for all experience levels on July 2 on the Taunton River. Take out is it at the Dighton Rock Museum, which will be open. What a reading list you can create, from the Golden Book classic, "Scuffy the Tugboat and his Adventures Down River" to Gary Paulsen's thriller "Danger on Midnight River." Don't forget to use Vera William's picture book, "Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe" to help plan what to put in your backpack. Those too young to sit still in a boat can still see what some crawly and furry river creatures look like, up-close, at Wild, Wild Wednesday on June 29 at 11 a.m., Fall River Public Library. There, an animal show in the Children's Room is planned outside the Elm Street entrance.

What child doesn't enjoy sitting on a lap and hearing a story? Start early, and the part of the brain that is associated with habit and learning will be rewarded. It is the appropriate experiences, happy and loving, that set the example. Together, we can create a healthy community for the youth of Greater Fall River.

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