

Adult Health Bulletin



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[NAME] County
Extension Office
222 Street Road
City, KY
Zip
(859) xxx-xxxx

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: MEDICAL MYTHS

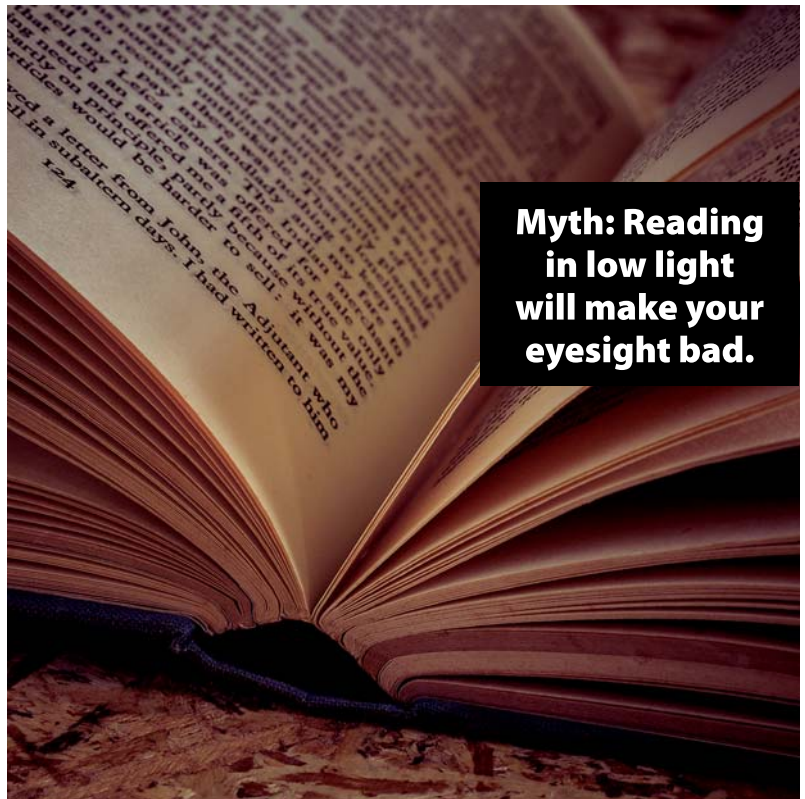
Have you ever heard these health statements:

- Reading in low light will make your eyesight bad.
- You should drink eight glasses of water a day.
- People only use 10 percent of their brain.
- If you shave your hair, it grows back courser and darker.

When it comes to health and medical advice, you may find that there are different sources and different opinions. Sometimes medical advice changes due to knowledge gained and examination of medical beliefs. In looking at the four above are they truly — fact or false?

Myth: Reading in low light will make your eyesight bad. According to the majority of those who study the eyes (ophthalmology),

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If you have questions about these or other medical myths, talk to your healthcare provider.

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reading in low light does not make your eyesight worse. However, there are a few short-term effects that reading in low light will have on your eyes. When you do not have a lot of light, you may have a harder time focusing on the words. In lower light your eyes do not blink as much, which may cause dryness of the eye. These effects do not last though.

Myth: You should drink 8 glasses of water a day. It is very important to drink water. However, making sure you are drinking at least eight glasses is nothing more than popular press advice, with no true medical evidence. Did you know that your body actually gets some water from drinks such as coffee, juice, milk and even carbonated drinks? Water is very important, especially when it is warm outside, when you have been physically active or when you are just feeling thirsty. You just may not need eight glasses of water every day.

Myth: People only use 10 percent of their brains. It is assumed that this myth is from the early 1900s. Advances in neurosciences such as brain imaging now show that people use much more than 10 percent of their brain. In fact, imaging has shown that there is no area of the brain that is completely inactive all of the time. There are times when part of the brain may “look” like it is inactive because of the task the individual is doing. Brains sometimes use only certain regions for certain tasks, but certainly use more than 10 percent.

Myth: If you shave your hair, it grows back coarser and darker. A study done in 1928 disproved this commonly held belief. Many people think that if they shave an area of hair, it will grow back coarser and darker. But what actually happens is that over time, hair growth results in a fine taper (or

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Myth: You should drink 8 glasses of water a day.

narrowing). When you first shave, the hair that grows back does not have that taper, so it feels coarser. Hair that has been exposed to sunlight becomes lighter. When hair grows back, it has not been exposed to the light and will appear darker.

If you have another “myth” that you are not sure about, talk to your healthcare provider.

SOURCE:

Vreeman, R.C. & Carroll, A.E (2007). Medical myths. *BMJ* 335, 1288.

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Written by: Nicole Peritore
Edited by: Connee Wheeler
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
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