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# Reading with children starting in infancy gives lasting literacy boost

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SAN FRANCISCO – New research at the 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting shows that reading books with a child beginning in early infancy can boost vocabulary and reading skills four years later, before the start of elementary school.

The abstract, “Early Reading Matters: Long-term Impacts of Shared Bookreading with Infants and Toddlers on Language and Literacy Outcomes,” will be presented on Monday, May 8, at the Moscone West Convention Center in San Francisco.

“These findings are exciting because they suggest that reading to young children, beginning even in early infancy, has a lasting effect on language, literacy and early reading skills,” said Carolyn Cates, PhD, lead author and research assistant professor in the department of pediatrics at New York University (NYU) School of Medicine. “What they’re learning when you read with them as infants,” she said, “still has an effect four years later when they’re about to begin elementary school.”

Mothers and their babies were recruited from the newborn nursery of an urban public hospital, with more than 250 pairs monitored between ages of 6 months and 4 and a half years (54 months) for how well they could understand words, and for early literacy and reading skills. The study was funded by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

The findings were compared with the quantity of shared book-reading, such as the number of books in the home and days per week spent reading together. Quality of shared book-reading was gauged by asking whether parents had conversations with their child about the book while reading, whether they talked about or labeled the pictures and the emotions of the characters in the book and whether the stories were age-appropriate.

Adjusting for socioeconomic differences, the researchers found that reading quality and quantity of shared book-reading in early infancy and toddlerhood predicted child vocabulary up to four years later, prior to school entry. Book-reading quality during early infancy, in particular, predicted early reading skills while book-reading quantity and quality during toddler years appeared strongly tied to later emergent literacy skills, such as name-writing at age 4.

The results highlight the importance of parenting programs used in pediatric primary care that promote shared book-reading soon after birth, Dr. Cates said, such as Read Out and Read and the Video Interaction Project..

Dr. Cates will present the abstract, “Early Reading Matters: Long-term Impacts of Shared Bookreading with Infants and Toddlers on Language and Literacy Outcomes,” at 8:15 a.m. The abstract is available at https://registration.pas-meeting.org/2017/reports/rptPAS17_Abstracts.asp.

*The Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) Meeting brings together thousands of individuals united by a common mission: to improve child health and well-being worldwide. This international gathering includes pediatric researchers, leaders in academic pediatrics, experts in child health, and practitioners. The PAS Meeting is produced through a partnership of four organizations leading the advancement of pediatric research and child advocacy: Academic Pediatric Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Pediatric Society, and Society for Pediatric Research. For more information, visit the PAS Meeting online at www.pas-meeting.org, follow us on Twitter @PASMeeting and #pasm17, or like us on Facebook. For additional AAP News coverage, visit http://www.aappublications.org/collection/pas-meeting-updates.*

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