

Audio books combat elderly loneliness

Audio books are an increasingly popular phenomenon as people lead busier lives and enjoy catching up with the latest bestsellers while commuting to work, doing the housework or exercising

For many older people who can no longer hold a book due to a condition such as arthritis, or read the text due to a visual impairment such as macular degeneration, audio books can be a lifeline to the wonderful world of literature that many of us take for granted and they can be very educational and interesting

Though MP3 CDs—easily playable on most modern CD players and DVD players—remain popular, more and more people are enjoying listening online.

Audio books can be a fantastic tool for older people who could perhaps be experiencing pain, discomfort, loneliness or boredom as a result of an illness or disability

Many older people live alone and, due to an age-related illness or disability, might struggle to partake in the usual leisure activities that many of us use for escapism or comfort, such as watching the television or reading a printed book. With audio books, people need only press play to hear a comforting voice read a story

As Listening Books' patron Stephen Fry says: "*The companionship and delight of a voice telling stories is incomparable*".

In addition, your parent can listen to an audio book when it's dark and when travelling or relaxing on holiday

They can select the exact track you want to listen to instead of flipping through several pages in the case of normal books. This saves a great deal of time

They can listen to audio books while doing other things around the house, or whilst walking. With an audio book someone else does the reading, while you do the absorbing

Audio books also expose people to new materials, broadening their appetites for literature, expanding their imaginations and encouraging them to pursue new pastimes

Listening Books

There are over 7000 titles in the Listening Books library

Classic books and old favourites that older people might now struggle to read in a printed format can still be enjoyed in an audio format and this can allow a great opportunity to lie back, listen and relax or to reminisce about past times

Non-fiction, educational titles are also available and these more cerebral offerings can help with mental stimulation to keep the mind active

New titles are added to the library frequently and you will find many of the latest commercial bestsellers in the Listening Books catalogue, offering older people the same access to titles as their friends and family, helping to encourage discussion and a shared passion

Audio books can prove quite expensive to buy but the UK charity, Listening Books, offers a low cost subscription to a library service where members can have MP3 CDs delivered straight to their front door or can choose to listen to titles online via internet streaming or downloading

Service support is available from Listening Books from a dedicated library team for infrequent computer users or those that lack confidence when navigating the internet

If you or someone you know would be interested in joining the service, please call the library team on 020 7407 9417, email library@listening-books.org.uk or visit www.listening-books.org.uk/join-us.aspx. Subscriptions start from as little as £20 per year but we are sometimes able to help people who would find the fee a barrier to joining the service

Helpful support packs

Listening Books was founded as a charity in 1959 by Norma Skemp after a serious car accident in 1954 caused her to virtually lose her sight. When she applied to another charity for help, she found that they could not help her because she could still “see something”. Norma immediately recognised a gap in provision for people with disabilities and she set up Listening Books, an organisation that could help people with a full range of print impairments. Today, the charity remains as passionate about providing access to books as ever and currently helps over 29,000 people to enjoy the same access to literature as the rest of the population. The range of genres available means there really is something for everyone: Listening Books knows how important books are to people and strongly believes this love and enjoyment of reading should not be curtailed by an illness or disability