

The dangers of long-term stress

The following text is taken from a manual for teenagers, *Fighting Invisible Tigers*. The book's author, Earl Hipp, uses the metaphor of the 'tiger' to stand for the stress that we can feel in our day-to-day lives.

- What happens when you live with stress constantly? When your life is full of tigers that never go away? You gradually adapt to higher and higher stress levels, and you may never find the time to calm down, rest, and recuperate. Soon you're living with an *unhealthy* amount of stress and calling it normal. Long-term stress can be dangerous because you may not be aware of the physical and emotional toll it is taking on you.
- 5 Why is long-term stress such a problem for so many people? We aren't taught about stress, so we don't recognize it even when we are up to our eyeballs in it. We all have stress factors in our lives that we're powerless to do anything about (parental decisions, school rules, homework, problems with friends, feeling unsafe). We face so many challenges that it isn't practical or possible to rest after each one.
- We're the products of a driven culture. We're taught from an early age that it's good to compete, win, stay
 10 busy, and always be productive. Most of us don't know how to relax. Relaxation skills aren't valued by our culture. It's more common (and accepted) to hurry and always do too much than it is to relax and be quiet for a period of time.
- Even our attempts at play can be filled with competition and pressures to be great at everything we do. Recreation is supposed to be re-creation – a chance to renew ourselves. Instead, it turns into *wreckreation*.
 15 We end up feeling more strung out and wrung out than when we started. We all do our best to live in our world full of tigers. We try to be responsible and handle everything that comes our way.
- Here are some of the things young people do in an effort to keep it all together: skipping meals, sleeping less, spending excessive time with friends and family, never talking about feelings and toughing it out by pretending to cope independently. When you try harder to keep up as the stress in your life increases,
 20 you may forget to take time for rest and recuperation. Without realizing it, you gradually lose your energy, positive attitude, and performance edge.
- Here are some of the symptoms young people have reported: more trouble with teachers, needing a lot of sleep or not sleeping well, wanting to eat all the time or never eating, headaches, stomach aches, colds, infections, sore muscles, escapist behaviour – overdoing one thing (TV, music, studying, sleeping) and
 25 ignoring other things, withdrawing from friends and family ("Just leave me alone!"), crying for no apparent reason, feeling like an idiot, restlessness, anxiety, worrying all the time, feeling like everything is out of control ("like I'm out of control"), depression, sadness, and irritability.
- You may be too busy adapting and coping with your stress factors to notice how you are changing. Unconsciously, you keep modifying your definition of what constitutes an acceptable level of stress.
 30 Suddenly the symptoms of overload seem to come out of nowhere. One minute you think you're fine, and the next you find yourself doubling over with cramps, tossing and turning at night, yelling at your mom, having two-day headaches, biting your nails, or gobbling whole crates of chips.

From *Invisible Tigers* (p10 to 12 with material from an earlier edition)



Reading comprehension

Choose the correct answer from A, B, C, or D.

1. The text is:

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|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. an article about dealing with stress | C. a blog on teenage mental health | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. an extract from a self-help book | D. a news story about teenagers. | |

2. The target audience for the text is probably:

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|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. social workers and administrators | C. mental health professionals | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. young people and their parents | D. the general public. | |

3. The writer seems to be:

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|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. a concerned parent | C. a guidance counsellor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. a newspaper journalist | D. a humanities teacher. | |

4. According to the text, living with high stress levels means:

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|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. we learn to relax despite high stress levels | C. we become dangerous to others | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. we can forget how much stress we have | D. we can make very bad decisions. | |

5. Which word from between lines 1 and 7 is nearest in meaning to the phrase "extent of damage"?

6. According to the text, why is long-term stress such a problem?

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|---|--|--------------------------|
| A. We do not know it exists. | C. We lack the strength to deal with it. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. We are not educated enough about it. | D. We forget how to relax. | |

7. The writer defines the term "a driven culture" (line 15) as a society that:

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|---|---|--------------------------|
| A. is demanding and full of tension | C. is very progressive and positive | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. leaves no room for individual expression | D. values self-reflection and relaxation. | |

8. The writer creates the term "*wreckreation*" to define leisure activities that:

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|---|---|--------------------------|
| A. are frequently violent and destructive | C. have no creative or artistic element | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. lack any sort of purpose or direction | D. create even more stress and tension. | |

9. When the writer says young people are trying “to keep it all together”, he means they are trying to:

- A. understand what they are doing
- B. work towards achieving excellence
- C. cope with the pressure they are under
- D. be positive and creative in their outlook.

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10. The writer concludes by saying:

- A. stress can cause bad habits such as overeating
- B. stress might cause irrational behaviour
- C. we find it hard to measure the stress in our lives
- D. we fail to notice the effect stress has on us.

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Vocabulary in context

Define the following phrases in your own words.

11. “up to our eyeballs” (line 10) Answer:

12. “strung out and wrung out” (line 21) Answer:

13. “performance edge” (line 27) Answer: