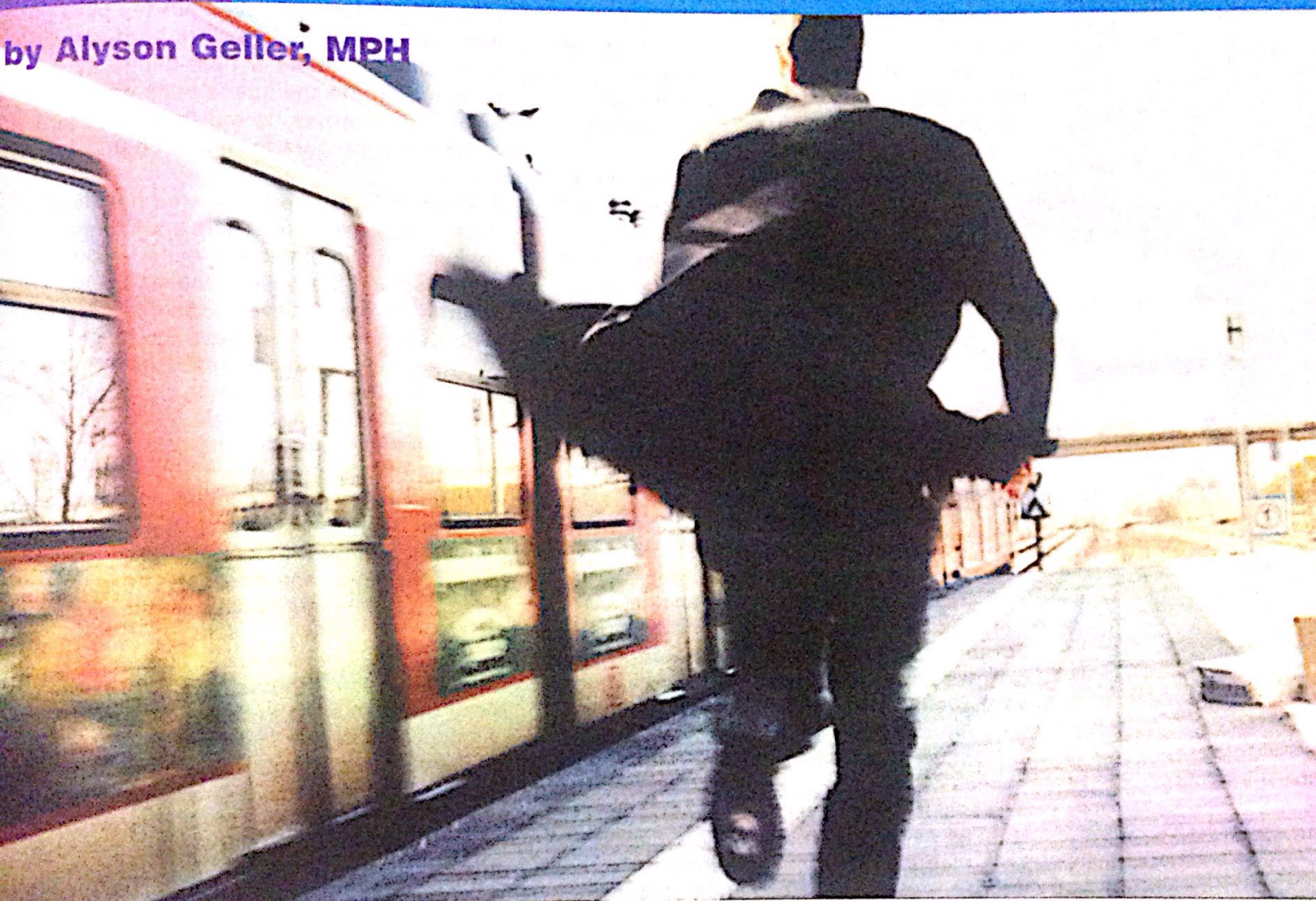


hurry sickness

by Alyson Geller, MPH



A According to statistics, it is becoming increasingly rare in many Western countries for families to eat together. It seems that people no longer have time to enjoy a meal, let alone buy and prepare the ingredients. Meanwhile, fast food outlets are proliferating. Further evidence of the effects of the increasing pace of life can be seen on all sides. Motorists drum their fingers impatiently at stop lights. Tempers flare in supermarket queues. Saddest of all is the success of an American series of books called "One Minute Bedtime Stories". What, one has to ask, do parents do with the time thus saved?

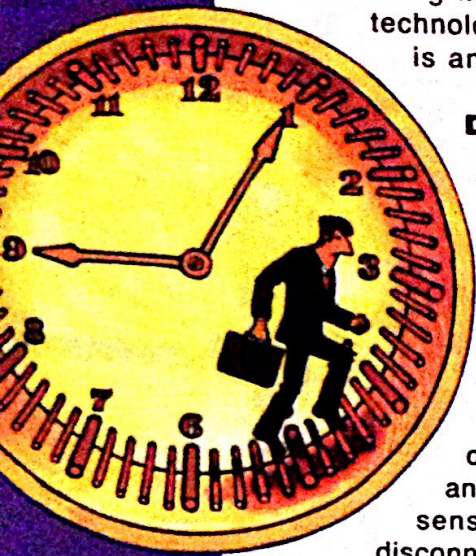
B According to Barton Sparagon, M.D., medical director of the Meyer Friedman Institute in San Francisco, and an expert

on stress-related illness, the above are all symptoms of a modern epidemic called "hurry sickness". The term was coined nearly 40 years ago by a prominent cardiologist, who noticed that all of his heart disease patients had common behavioural characteristics, the most obvious being that they were in a chronic rush. Hurry sickness has been an issue in our culture ever since, but the problem is escalating in degree and intensity, leading to rudeness, short-tempered behaviour and even violence, alongside a range of physical ills.

C The primary culprit, according to Sparagon, is the increasing prevalence of technology – like e-mail, cell phones, pagers and laptop computers. We can bring

work home, into our bedrooms and on our vacations. Time has sped up for so many people, and there is increased pressure to do more in the same number of hours, says Sparagon.

Jill Stein, a sociologist at the University of California at Los Angeles, agrees that time is being more compressed than ever. "In the past, an overnight letter used to be a big deal. Now if you can't send an e-mail attachment, there's something wrong. Because the technology is available to us, there is an irresistible urge to use it."



D What about those annoying people who shout into their cell phones, oblivious to those around them? Stein says that self-centred behaviour is related to larger social trends as well as technology.

"There is a breakdown of the nuclear family, of community, of belonging; and an increased alienation and sense that we're all disconnected from one another. This breakdown came before the technology, but the technology has exacerbated it." Now we connect through this technology, says Stein, and we don't have face-to-face interaction.

Ironically, as people pull their cell phones out in the most unlikely venues, our personal lives are available on a public level as never before. People are having work meetings and conversations about their spouses and their therapy sessions with complete impunity. Ordinarily we'd never be exposed to this information, says Stein.

E Sparagon claims that there is more a sense of entitlement now than ever ("Why should anyone slow me down?"). But he warns that there is more than civility at stake. "This chronic impatience is damaging not only to our social environment, but to our physical health. It builds, and then it doesn't take much to explode. And for those who repress it, it's equally damaging."

The high-tech revolution and the lifestyle it has spawned have brought with them a rash of serious health problems, including heart attacks, palpitations,

depression, anxiety, immune disorders, digestive ills, insomnia and migraines. Sparagon says that human beings are not designed for prolonged, high-speed activity. "When you look at our heart rates, brain-wave patterns – our basic physiology has not evolved to keep pace with the technology – we are hard-wired to be able to handle a 'fight-flight' response where the stress ends within five to ten minutes. In our current culture, though, we struggle for hours on end."

F Even children are not spared the ills of modern-day overload. There's a hidden epidemic of symptoms like hypertension, migraines and digestive problems among children as young as ten – disorders never before seen in children, says Sparagon. Whether these problems result from being swept into the maelstrom of their parents' lives, or from full loads of extracurricular activities and unprecedented homework requirements – up to five hours a night for some – children are experiencing the same sense of overload, time pressure and demands that their parents experience, says Sparagon, "and they don't have coping mechanisms to deal with it."

G Recovery is possible, but Sparagon emphasises that there is no quick fix. Many of these stress-related behaviours have become deeply ingrained to the point where people are hardly aware of them. The greatest paradox, he says, is that even when people are ready to change their behaviour, they are in a hurry to do so.

H Sparagon works with people to become aware of their stress and the impact it's having on their lives. They examine their belief systems (What is really important? What can they let go of?) and they learn to challenge their behaviours. One popular exercise is to assign a chronically impatient person to stand in the longest line in the grocery store.

The only answer is to take it one day at a time. The irony is that all the techniques and technology designed to streamline our lives may ultimately be counterproductive. As Sparagon says, "People are finding that all of this multi-tasking, rushing and worrying is not only making life intolerable, but actually making them less efficient than they could otherwise be."

4 There are several types of multiple-choice question. You may have to choose one answer from four options (e.g. Question 7 in the task below), or more than one answer from a longer list of options (e.g. Questions 8–11 below). The approach, however, is the same.

TASK APPROACH

- Study the options first and ask yourself which seem(s) likely to be correct.
- Find the relevant section of text and read it very carefully.
- For each option, ask yourself these key questions:
 - 1 Is it mentioned in the article?
It may look true or logical but make sure the idea actually comes from the text.
 - 2 Is it true?
The article may contain words like this, but check to see if this is the real meaning.
 - 3 Is it relevant?
It may be mentioned in the article, and true, but not answer the question.

Question 7

Choose the appropriate letter **A–D**.

- 7** One result of technology and the increased pace of life is that people
- A** frequently meet work colleagues in public places.
 - B** have personal telephone conversations in public.
 - C** need to visit therapists on a regular basis.
 - D** no longer have offices to work from.

Questions 8–11

The article mentions a number of factors that contribute to 'hurry sickness'. Which **FOUR** of the following (**A–H**) are mentioned?

List of Factors

- A** Jobs are less secure and people must work harder to keep them.
- B** Our bodies are not designed to cope with stress for long periods.
- C** People are becoming more short-tempered and violent.
- D** People are expected to try and achieve more in the time available.
- E** Communications have become faster.
- F** Too much stress can lead to physical disease.
- G** Globalisation has led to 24-hour trading.
- H** People want to use the new technology which is available.

The four factors which contribute to 'hurry sickness' are:

- 8** **9** **10** **11**

EXTRA PRACTICE

- 5 In addition to the four correct answers, find:
- two which are results rather than causes of 'hurry sickness'
 - two possible factors which are not mentioned in the passage.

► Summary completion

- 6 This task was introduced in Unit 1 (page 12). In this second example, your answers must be words or phrases taken from the text.

TASK APPROACH

- First, read through the whole summary for general understanding.
- Read it again carefully, studying the words before and after each gap and thinking about the general meaning.
- Find the relevant section of text and re-read carefully to find the answer.
- Make sure your answers fit logically and grammatically.

Questions 12–16

Complete the summary below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

Hurry sickness is not a new condition but it has increased both in
 12 in recent years, mainly as a result of the rapid
 development of 13 Typical symptoms include chronic
 impatience, which experts believe can have potentially serious effects not only
 on those around us but also on our 14 The fact that
 children are also beginning to suffer from a variety of 15
 suggests that they are as vulnerable to the pressures of modern life as their
 parents. Curing the condition is a slow process, which requires the sufferer to
 16 the stress in their lives, and try to change their
 behaviour patterns.

VOCABULARY

- 7 The following words occur in the text on pages 43–44. Study the context and choose the correct meaning from the list on page 47. This will be easier if you first identify what part of speech each one is.

- 1 ... fast food outlets are *proliferating* (Section A)
- 2 ... a modern *epidemic* called 'hurry sickness' (B)
- 3 The term was *coined* nearly 40 years ... (B)
- 4/5 The primary *culprit* ... is the increasing *prevalence* of technology ... (C)
- 6 This breakdown came before technology, but the technology has *exacerbated* it. (D)
- 7 ... conversations about their *spouses* ... (D)
- 8 ... full loads of *extracurricular* activities ... (F)
- 9 The greatest *paradox* ... is that even when people are ready to change their behaviour, they are in a hurry to do so. (G)
- 10 ... all the techniques and technology ... may ... be *counterproductive* (H)

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- A *n* widespread existence
- B *n* statement which seems to be impossible because it says two opposite things
- C *v* made worse
- D *adj* having the opposite effect to that intended
- E *n* something which develops and spreads quickly (e.g. an infectious disease)
- F *n* husbands or wives
- G *adj* outside the regular course of work in a school or college
- H *v* invented
- I *v* rapidly increase in numbers
- J *n* person or thing guilty of a crime or offence
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