

**READING COMPREHENSION:**

b) Read through the text and then find which answer A, B, C or D best fits the statement in each question. Put the letter to the number in the box below. There is an example at the beginning.

1 What does the writer say in the first paragraph about Fiennes' obsession with diet and health?

- A It was unreasonable even for an explorer.
- B It had become more intense with time.
- C It contributed to his collapse.
- D It makes subsequent events hard to believe.

2 On the question of who will live longest, it seems that

- A genetic make-up is the main factor.
- B there is no clear explanation why some people outlive others.
- C lifestyle choices play little part.
- D family history is not as significant as once thought.

3 According to the text, one of the positive effects of taking regular exercise is that it

- A speeds up the heart rate.
- B strengthens blood vessels.
- C quickens the pulse.
- D reduces heart exertion.

4 What does health expert Len Almond imply?

- A Our bodies can cope with intense physical stress.
- B We should allow a long period of recovery after any physical exercise.
- C There is more to learn about the effects of physical stress.
- D Taking part in endurance sports is harmful in the long term.

5 Experts in sports medicine have

- A studied the effects of altitude on various types of athletes.
- B questioned the wisdom of taking part in extreme sports.
- C found a common factor among competitors in extreme sports.
- D discovered an enzyme which causes heart attacks in cyclists.

6 What final conclusion about exercise does the writer reach?

- A It makes life more enjoyable.
- B It may not be worth the effort.
- C It should be done in moderation.
- D It ought to be a priority.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>D</b>					

Score: ...../5

## An Unhealthy Obsession

*The Guinness Book of World Records* describes Ranulph Fiennes as the world's latest living explorer. His expeditions include the first polar circumnavigation of the Earth and the first unsupported crossing of the Antarctic continent on foot. He has been up the White Nile in a hovercraft, and parachuted onto Europe's highest glacier. An obsession with diet and fitness comes with the territory, and for years Fiennes has fine-tuned his body to cope with the most inhospitable of environments and the most stressful situations of physical hell. So when I read that this model of physical fitness had gone and suffered a heart attack- not while planting a flag in a no-man's-land, but while boarding a plane - it came as something of a surprise.

Given what happened, lesser mortals like myself might be forgiven for wondering whether the benefits of following a healthy lifestyle are all they're cracked up to be. Why bother exerting all that effort if in the end survival turns out to be a lottery? Of course fitness and diet are only part of the story. 'Some people live a healthy lifestyle and still succumb to heart problems,' health expert Alison Shaw explains. Genetics and family history also play a crucial role in determining who will achieve longevity, 'It could all be a question of genes', she says, 'but then some people never have a trace of the disease even though their family history would seem to make them prime targets.'

Whether or not some people are genetically programmed to have a higher chance of heart disease, there are steps they can take to reduce their risks. A healthy diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables and reduced levels of saturated fat helps prevent obesity and stops fatty deposits forming in the arteries and blocking them. Smoking, incidentally, has the opposite effect, as nicotine increases the heart rate and makes the blood clot more easily.

Exercise is highly beneficial as it reduces both the pulse rate and blood pressure so minimising strain on the heart as it pumps blood round the body. It also helps to keep the artery walls more elastic. 'Whether you've got a family history of heart disease or not, everybody should be living a healthy lifestyle,' Shaw says. 'We wouldn't want people to stop looking after themselves.'

But can you look after yourself too much? On the subject of exercise, the standard recommendation is to take five sessions of 'moderate' exercise a week, where moderate is a little more than brisk walking. 'We need to be very careful when we're doing extreme sports or endurance events,' says health expert Len Almond. 'Extreme physical stress can impose almost impossible demands on the body's ability to recover. The strain of endurance events such as exploration force biochemical changes in the human body. The physiological response to that kind of activity will be extreme ... and how the body overcomes that is bound to leave some kind of legacy.' So could Fiennes' love for exploration and endurance events have contributed to his condition? 'It could have had an effect, or there may be genetic predisposition and an event could have made it worse,' says Almond. 'We haven't done enough research in this area.'

This is changing though. There is growing interest in sports medicine, a field that arguably began as long ago as 490BC when the first person to run the marathon ran the 26 miles from the town of Marathon to Athens with news of a victory over the Persians. The man, a soldier called Pheidippides, collapsed as soon as he arrived, and the cause of his sudden demise is not known. However, scientists are using athletes like him to answer questions about the effects of extreme exercise on the heart. One group, at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, studied cyclists taking part in a race called the Tyrolean Oetztaler Radmarathon, a one-day event that covers 230km with an altitude change of 5,500m. They were interested in one particular enzyme, high concentrations of which are found in those who have suffered a heart attack. The scientists found that levels of this chemical increased in 13 of the 38 cyclists who completed the race. The largest increases were seen in the youngest, fastest cyclists who had trained the hardest. Similar increases in the chemical have been found in competitors in the Hawaii Ironman triathlon and in cross-country skiers.

Most of us will never put our bodies to such severe tests. But when you hear about someone like Fiennes you ask whether exercise is worth it, I advise you to consider your own priorities. Personally, I subscribe to this adage sent in by a reader to a local newspaper: 'Run not to add years to your life but to add life to your years.'