

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #618
The Deadly History of Tuberculosis
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Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to talk about one of the most deadly diseases in human history: tuberculosis.

[00:00:31] It's a story of science, of social class, of romanticism, and of the extraordinary way a deadly disease came to be seen as something beautiful.

[00:00:42] OK then, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:00:48] It is the winter of 1820, and a young English poet is coughing into his [handkerchief¹](#).

[00:00:57] He looks at what he has produced. He sees blood. Bright red blood.

[00:01:04] He recognises it immediately. He has seen it before, in his brother, who died of the same disease two years earlier.

[00:01:13] "I know the colour of that blood", he says to a friend.

[00:01:17] "It is [arterial²](#) blood;—I cannot be deceived by that colour"

[00:01:21] "That drop of blood is my [death-warrant³](#); I must die."

[00:01:28] The man is the famous Romantic poet, John Keats. He is twenty-five years old.

¹ a small piece of cloth used to clean his nose or face

² related to blood moving from the heart

³ a sign that I will soon die

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[00:01:35] He is not wrong. He will be dead within the year.

[00:01:40] Keats was just one of the millions of people who would die that year from the disease, a disease that was **at its peak**⁴ responsible for one in four deaths in Europe, and still kills more than a million people per year today.

[00:01:58] And here is the strange thing about this story, and about the **peculiar**⁵ nature of tuberculosis.

[00:02:05] Across Europe at this time, people were reading the poetry of men like Keats and **weeping**⁶. Not just at the beauty of his words, of his poetry, but at the **supposed**⁷ beauty of his suffering. At the romance of his **decline**⁸.

[00:02:24] Unlike diseases that had come before it, things like the Black Death, there was something different, almost **admirable**⁹, **enviable**¹⁰, about tuberculosis.

[00:02:37] The pale skin, the thinness, the bright **feverish**¹¹ eyes, the sense of a person burning **intensely**¹² and briefly, like a candle: these were considered by some to be

⁴ at its highest or strongest point

⁵ strange or unusual

⁶ crying

⁷ believed or thought to be true

⁸ a slow movement towards death or weakness

⁹ deserving respect

¹⁰ making other people wish they had it

¹¹ looking very hot and ill

¹² very strongly

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marks of a sensitive soul. Of an artistic nature. Of someone too [refined](#)¹³ and too alive for the [dull material world](#)¹⁴.

[00:03:04] Today, we are going to explore how that happened.

[00:03:09] Now, although most people associate tuberculosis with the nineteenth century, tuberculosis has been around for centuries, [millennia](#)¹⁵ even.

[00:03:20] There's evidence of it in Egyptian mummies, in ancient Rome, ancient India and China.

[00:03:27] It has always been there, but it wasn't until the late 18th century that it really reached its peak.

[00:03:36] For this, we have the Industrial Revolution to thank.

[00:03:40] From the late eighteenth century, starting in northern England and later spreading through Europe, millions of people left the countryside and moved to cities.

[00:03:52] They moved because the cities were where the work was, in the factories and [mills](#)¹⁶ and [foundries](#)¹⁷ that were [springing up](#)¹⁸ everywhere. The promise of wages.

¹³ polite, cultured, and elegant

¹⁴ an ordinary life focused only on money and physical things

¹⁵ thousands of years

¹⁶ factories where materials were made or processed

¹⁷ factories where metal was melted and shaped

¹⁸ appearing quickly

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The promise of something better than the [subsistence](#)¹⁹ living they were [eking out](#)²⁰ in the fields.

[00:04:10] What they found, in many cases, was this: twelve, fourteen, sixteen-hour working days in rooms with no natural light and no [ventilation](#)²¹. Housing that was not really housing, more like stacked wooden boxes, each containing a family, each sharing walls and ceilings and air with six other families. Streets so narrow that sunlight barely reached the ground.

[00:04:41] This was the perfect [breeding ground](#)²² for tuberculosis, TB, or the White Plague, as it would come to be called.

[00:04:51] Now, tuberculosis is a [contagious](#)²³ disease caused by a particular type of [bacterium](#)²⁴, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, to give it its official name.

[00:05:04] It spreads through the air. When an infected person coughs, sneezes, or simply breathes, tiny droplets carrying the bacteria [disperse](#)²⁵ into the surrounding air.

¹⁹ having only the basic things needed to live

²⁰ managing to have with difficulty

²¹ the movement of fresh air through a place

²² a place where it grew easily

²³ able to spread from person to person

²⁴ a tiny living thing that can cause disease

²⁵ spread out

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[00:05:19] In a [well-ventilated](#)²⁶ space, or outside, the droplets disperse and become harmless. In a [packed](#)²⁷, airless factory or a crowded [tenement](#)²⁸ room, they do not.

[00:05:33] The bacterium is passed from one person to another. Perhaps interestingly enough, 90-95% of people who are infected do not become sick, and instead, the bacteria remain inactive in the body. This is called [latent](#)²⁹ tuberculosis, and it's estimated that even today, around a quarter of the world's population have it.

[00:06:01] But for 5-10% of those infected, it turns into active tuberculosis, and for much of human history, that was a [death sentence](#)³⁰.

[00:06:16] In most cases, it affects the lungs, but it can also spread to other organs.

[00:06:23] The infected person will typically cough up blood and feel [short of breath](#)³¹, they'll have high fever, they will lose weight, and for most of human history, this '[wasting away](#)³²' would typically last anywhere from two to five years before the body finally [succumbed](#)³³.

[00:06:45] And by the middle of the 19th century, it was responsible for one out of every four deaths.

²⁶ having plenty of fresh air

²⁷ very crowded

²⁸ a large building with small poor flats

²⁹ present but inactive

³⁰ something certain to cause death

³¹ unable to breathe easily

³² becoming thinner and weaker over time

³³ died from it

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[00:06:53] It did not **discriminate**³⁴. It killed factory workers and it killed kings. It killed the young and the old, the healthy and the weak, the rich and the poor. It was so **widespread**³⁵ it became simply a fact of life, as ordinary and expected as poverty or cold winters.

[00:07:16] Doctors did not know what caused it, or how to cure it.

[00:07:21] Because the disease was so widespread and so apparently random, **striking**³⁶ some people and **sparing**³⁷ others who lived in identical conditions, doctors didn't initially believe it was contagious.

[00:07:37] Two alternative explanations rose to fill the gap.

[00:07:41] The first was **predisposition**³⁸. Some people, it was believed, simply came from families **prone to**³⁹ consumption, likely to get it. If your mother or sister had died of it, you were likely to follow. Now, this was not entirely wrong, and there is some link between genetics and likelihood of developing the disease.

[00:08:08] But it also gave doctors a convenient excuse — "well, you were always **bound to**⁴⁰ get it".

³⁴ treat some people differently

³⁵ happening in many places or among many people

³⁶ affecting suddenly

³⁷ not harming

³⁸ a natural tendency to get a disease

³⁹ likely to suffer from

⁴⁰ certain or very likely to

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[00:08:16] The second explanation was what they called excitement. Not excitement in an emotional sense, but in a medical sense: the idea that certain activities or conditions could [trigger](#)⁴¹ or worsen the disease in those who were [predisposed](#)⁴² to it.

[00:08:36] And the list of possible [excitants](#)⁴³, or things that could cause TB, was extraordinary.

[00:08:44] Working too hard. Not working hard enough. Sleeping too much. Sleeping too little. Eating too much. Not eating enough. Being too cold. Being too warm. Reading too much. Doing too little exercise, or too much of it.

[00:08:59] And wearing the wrong clothes.

[00:09:03] The concern, [broadly](#)⁴⁴, was about too much or too little clothing, and there has been much [commentary](#)⁴⁵ on the link between ideas about tuberculosis and the fashion of the time.

[00:09:16] Too little clothing exposed the body to cold and damp, which was thought to disrupt the [circulation](#)⁴⁶ of the blood and allow disease to settle in the lungs.

Off-the-shoulder styles that became fashionable in the 1820s and 1830s were

⁴¹ cause it to start

⁴² naturally more likely to get it

⁴³ things believed to cause or worsen the illness

⁴⁴ generally

⁴⁵ spoken or written opinions and discussion

⁴⁶ the movement of blood around the body

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[condemned](#)⁴⁷ for exposing the [collarbone](#)⁴⁸ and neckline. Thin stockings could also be a problem. Even the dropping of high men's [waistcoats](#)⁴⁹ was a cause for concern.

[00:09:46] Too much clothing was equally problematic, and for the opposite reason.

[00:09:51] Too many layers were thought to trap the body's [impurities](#)⁵⁰ inside, preventing the skin from [expelling](#)⁵¹ what it should.

[00:10:00] Of course, all of this was rubbish, it was medically incorrect. But it's quite [revealing](#)⁵² about the way Victorians thought about the connection between disease, behaviour, and [morality](#)⁵³.

[00:10:16] And the other thing to mention is that there is one school of thought, and quite a [prominent](#)⁵⁴ book, that suggests that tuberculosis, and the physical effects of it, actually shaped fashion in the 18th and 19th century, that people — especially women — would do their make up in a way that made them look like they had tuberculosis. Pale skin, red lips, and even using [toxic](#)⁵⁵ cosmetics to make their pupils more [dilated](#)⁵⁶.

⁴⁷ strongly criticised

⁴⁸ the bone between the shoulder and neck

⁴⁹ sleeveless jackets worn over a shirt

⁵⁰ dirty or harmful substances

⁵¹ pushing out

⁵² showing it clearly

⁵³ beliefs about right and wrong

⁵⁴ important and well-known

⁵⁵ poisonous

⁵⁶ made wider or larger

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[00:10:49] However, there are other historians who say that this connection is [exaggerated⁵⁷](#), and that tuberculosis simply [coincided with⁵⁸](#) [pre-existing⁵⁹](#) fashion trends; it didn't cause them.

[00:11:02] What is agreed upon, however, is that the disease did have a [glamorous⁶⁰](#) quality to it.

[00:11:09] It didn't cover you with warts or turn you mad. It made you thin and pale, your cheeks [rosy⁶¹](#), your lips red, and your eyes [sparkly⁶²](#).

[00:11:21] Lord Byron once said he wished he could die of [consumption⁶³](#), because the ladies would say how interesting he looked in dying. And he spent considerable effort [cultivating⁶⁴](#) the [aesthetic⁶⁵](#): the [pallor⁶⁶](#), the thinness, the air of tragic intensity.

[00:11:40] What's more, the disease often took on an even a [semi-religious⁶⁷](#) quality.

[00:11:46] Death came slowly, typically over the course of months and years, not days.

⁵⁷ made to seem bigger or more important than it really is

⁵⁸ happened at the same time as

⁵⁹ already there before it

⁶⁰ attractive and exciting

⁶¹ pink and healthy-looking

⁶² bright and shining

⁶³ an old name for tuberculosis

⁶⁴ trying to develop or create

⁶⁵ particular style or appearance

⁶⁶ very pale skin

⁶⁷ partly connected to religion

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[00:11:54] There was time for [farewells](#)⁶⁸, for forgiveness, for the expressions of comfort that both the dying and the [grieving](#)⁶⁹ desperately needed.

[00:12:04] Physically, it was almost as if you could see the life drifting away from the [bed-ridden](#)⁷⁰ patient, the body wasting away. The eyes large and [luminous](#)⁷¹. A fever giving a certain intensity and brightness to everything.

[00:12:21] And a calmness. Even a [serenity](#)⁷², as if this caused the dying person to accept their fate in a way other diseases did not. In their final hours, the patient existed somewhere between the living and the dead. Closer to heaven than any healthy person could be, half human, half angel.

[00:12:47] Now, so far we have really been talking about the romanticism of tuberculosis by a certain class of people: the wealthy, the [leisured](#)⁷³, the people who had the time and means to write poetry and [gad about](#)⁷⁴ from townhouse to townhouse.

⁶⁸ goodbye messages

⁶⁹ people feeling great sadness

⁷⁰ unable to leave bed because of illness

⁷¹ glowing or shining softly

⁷² calmness and peace

⁷³ having plenty of free time and money

⁷⁴ to go around socially without serious purpose

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[00:13:05] For the majority of people who died of tuberculosis, there was of course nothing romantic about it. Factory workers dying alone in a crowded apartment, children dying in a [workhouse](#)⁷⁵, buried in an [unmarked grave](#)⁷⁶.

[00:13:22] These were the majority, forgotten to history.

[00:13:26] By the middle of the 19th century, TB was killing 1% of London's population every single year, and was responsible for 40% of all deaths of working-class people.

[00:13:42] But by the 1870s, the science of disease was changing.

[00:13:48] The old explanations — predisposition, excitement, bad air, moral weakness — they were rightly beginning to be [dismissed](#)⁷⁷, to be replaced by [germ theory](#)⁷⁸.

[00:14:02] This was the idea that many diseases were caused by specific living [organisms](#)⁷⁹, invisible to the [naked eye](#)⁸⁰, that invaded the body and reproduced within it.

[00:14:15] Robert Koch, a German doctor, was one of the great figures of this new science. And on the 24th of March, 1882, he stood before the Berlin Physiological Society and delivered one of the most important scientific announcements in history.

[00:14:36] He had found the bacterium that caused tuberculosis.

[00:14:41] Mycobacterium tuberculosis, he called it.

⁷⁵ a place where very poor people lived and worked

⁷⁶ a grave without a name or sign

⁷⁷ rejected as wrong or unimportant

⁷⁸ the idea that germs cause disease

⁷⁹ living things

⁸⁰ normal human sight without tools

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[00:14:46] Over the [preceding](#)⁸¹ months, Koch had developed entirely new laboratory techniques to [isolate](#)⁸² it, he had grown it [in culture](#)⁸³ outside the body, he had infected healthy animals with it, and he had watched them develop the disease.

[00:15:03] He had proved, [conclusively](#)⁸⁴, that tuberculosis was not [hereditary](#)⁸⁵. Not caused by cold air or moral weakness or wearing the wrong stockings. It was an infection. A bacterium. Something that could, in principle, be understood and beaten.

[00:15:24] Koch won the Nobel Prize for his efforts. He had discovered what caused tuberculosis, but, importantly, this did not equal discovering how to treat it.

[00:15:37] No drug capable of killing the tuberculosis bacterium could be found. The organism was unusual: slow-growing and protected by a [waxy](#)⁸⁶ [outer coat](#)⁸⁷ that most substances could not [penetrate](#)⁸⁸.

[00:15:54] What grew up instead was something called the [sanitarium](#)⁸⁹, a type of [specialised](#)⁹⁰ hospital, typically far from a city, near the sea or up in the mountains.

⁸¹ happening before

⁸² separate it from other things

⁸³ in a laboratory

⁸⁴ in a way that proved it completely

⁸⁵ passed down through families

⁸⁶ smooth and slightly oily, like wax

⁸⁷ outside layer

⁸⁸ get through or enter

⁸⁹ a hospital for long-term illness, especially tuberculosis

⁹⁰ designed for this particular purpose

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[00:16:07] The logic was straightforward. It was the urban environment where tuberculosis [flourished⁹¹](#), with its crowding, its pollution, its lack of sunlight and fresh air. So removing the patient from that environment might allow the body's own [defences⁹²](#) to fight the disease.

[00:16:27] Sanitaria spread across Europe and North America. They were built high in the Alps and the Scottish Highlands, on the coasts of southern Europe, in the mountain ranges of the American west.

[00:16:41] Patients were given beds on open-air terraces, even in winter. They were encouraged to sleep outdoors, to breathe deeply, to eat large amounts of food. Some facilities recommended as many as six thousand calories a day, which is about three times the daily recommendation for an adult woman, or for the McDonald's fans, 11 Big Macs.

[00:17:08] For those who could afford the better establishments, a sanitarium could be almost pleasant: a long rest in beautiful surroundings with regular meals and medical [supervision⁹³](#).

[00:17:21] For the poor in the public sanatoria, the experience was something closer to a prison. You were removed from your family, your work, your life. You might stay for months or years.

⁹¹ grew or spread successfully

⁹² the body's way of fighting illness

⁹³ being watched and cared for

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[00:17:36] And unfortunately, the sanatoria didn't work particularly well, whether private or public.

[00:17:44] Rest and good food could strengthen a patient. Clean air reduced the spread of infection to others.

[00:17:51] But for those already seriously ill, the "cure" was often temporary. Many would stay for years, seemingly improving, only to [relapse](#)⁹⁴ and die the moment they returned to the [smog](#)⁹⁵ and poverty of the city.

[00:18:10] There was a step forward with the BCG vaccine, which was first [administered](#)⁹⁶ in 1921, but while it reduced the risk of severe disease; it did not [eliminate](#)⁹⁷ tuberculosis.

[00:18:24] The real answer arrived in 1943, in a soil laboratory in New Jersey.

[00:18:32] A scientist named Selman Waksman had spent years studying the [microorganisms](#)⁹⁸ that live in soil, [reasoning](#)⁹⁹ that if bacteria can destroy each other in nature, some of them might produce substances that could be useful as medicines.

[00:18:51] He and his team tested thousands of soil samples. Most produced nothing.

[00:18:59] Then they found one that did.

⁹⁴ become ill again after getting better

⁹⁵ dirty air caused by smoke and pollution

⁹⁶ officially given

⁹⁷ completely remove

⁹⁸ tiny living things only visible with a microscope

⁹⁹ thinking carefully to reach a conclusion

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[00:19:02] A common soil bacterium produced a substance that could kill

Mycobacterium tuberculosis in the laboratory. They called it streptomycin.

[00:19:14] On the 20th of November, 1944, streptomycin was given for the first time to a human patient: a young woman who was [critically ill](#)¹⁰⁰ with tuberculosis and had been expected to die within weeks.

[00:19:30] [Miraculously](#)¹⁰¹, she recovered.

[00:19:33] The response in the medical world was something close to [disbelief](#)¹⁰². Here was a drug that could actually cure a disease that had killed large parts of the population for two centuries. Waksman received the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1952.

[00:19:53] Over the following decades, more antibiotics followed. TB [wards](#)¹⁰³ began to empty. Sanatoria closed. In the wealthy countries of Europe and North America, tuberculosis became increasingly rare. And by the 1980s, some public health officials were quietly talking about eliminating it entirely.

[00:20:18] But, as you may know, tuberculosis has never gone away.

[00:20:23] While the developed world was congratulating itself on [all but](#)¹⁰⁴ defeating it, the disease continued in the parts of the world that could not afford antibiotics, could not build hospitals, and could not fund public health campaigns.

¹⁰⁰ extremely sick

¹⁰¹ in a surprising and wonderful way

¹⁰² rejection or inability to believe it

¹⁰³ sections of a hospital

¹⁰⁴ almost completely

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[00:20:40] Today, tuberculosis still infects around ten million people every year. In 2024, it killed approximately 1.25 million people, making it one of the leading infectious disease killers on the planet.

[00:21:00] The vast majority of those deaths occur in South-East Asia, [sub-Saharan](#)¹⁰⁵ Africa, and the Western Pacific, in conditions of poverty and [overcrowding](#)¹⁰⁶ that would have been familiar to the factory workers of Manchester in 1840.

[00:21:15] And now there is an additional problem making the situation [considerably](#)¹⁰⁷ worse: [drug-resistant](#)¹⁰⁸ tuberculosis.

[00:21:24] This happens when antibiotics are used incorrectly — when [courses](#)¹⁰⁹ of treatment are [interrupted](#)¹¹⁰, people are given the wrong doses, or lower quality drugs are used.

[00:21:36] In these cases, the tuberculosis bacteria can [evolve](#)¹¹¹ to resist the drugs, and in 2024, an estimated 390,000 people developed drug-resistant tuberculosis. Treating it

¹⁰⁵ relating to the area south of the Sahara Desert in Africa

¹⁰⁶ having too many people in one place

¹⁰⁷ a lot

¹⁰⁸ not affected by medicines anymore

¹⁰⁹ full periods of medical treatment

¹¹⁰ stopped before finishing

¹¹¹ change slowly over time

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requires different, more expensive [regimens](#)¹¹², with more severe [side effects](#)¹¹³ and much lower success rates.

[00:22:02] Of those 390,000 people, only around two in five were able to access any treatment at all.

[00:22:12] So the unfortunate point we need to end with is this: Tuberculosis has had a cure since 1944. The drugs exist. The vaccine exists. The knowledge of how it spreads, and how to prevent it, has been [established](#)¹¹⁴ for well over a century.

[00:22:31] It doesn't have to kill anyone, yet it still kills 1.25 million people a year.

[00:22:39] And I think we can all agree that there is nothing romantic about that.

[00:22:45] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on the deadly history of tuberculosis.

[00:22:50] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:22:54] We've already made a few episodes on things related to this episode, which you might like to check out if you haven't done so already.

[00:23:01] There's an episode on Lord Byron, which is episode 244, on the Brontë sisters, several of whom died of tuberculosis, which is episode 271, and on the Industrial Revolution, which is episode 150.

[00:23:18] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

¹¹² planned courses of medical treatment

¹¹³ unwanted results from medicine or treatment

¹¹⁴ clearly proved or accepted

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[00:23:22] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Handkerchief	a small piece of cloth used to clean his nose or face
Arterial	related to blood moving from the heart
Death-warrant	a sign that I will soon die
At its peak	at its highest or strongest point
Peculiar	strange or unusual
Weeping	crying
Supposed	believed or thought to be true
Decline	a slow movement towards death or weakness
Admirable	deserving respect
Envable	making other people wish they had it
Feverish	looking very hot and ill
Intensely	very strongly
Refined	polite, cultured, and elegant

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Dull material world an ordinary life focused only on money and physical things

Millennia thousands of years

Mills factories where materials were made or processed

Foundries factories where metal was melted and shaped

Springing up appearing quickly

Subsistence having only the basic things needed to live

Eking out managing to have with difficulty

Ventilation the movement of fresh air through a place

Breeding ground a place where it grew easily

Contagious able to spread from person to person

Bacterium a tiny living thing that can cause disease

Disperse spread out

Well-ventilated having plenty of fresh air

Packed very crowded

Tenement a large building with small poor flats

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Latent	present but inactive
Death sentence	something certain to cause death
Short of breath	unable to breathe easily
Wasting away	becoming thinner and weaker over time
Succumbed	died from it
Discriminate	treat some people differently
Widespread	happening in many places or among many people
Striking	affecting suddenly
Sparing	not harming
Predisposition	a natural tendency to get a disease
Prone to	likely to suffer from
Bound to	certain or very likely to
Trigger	cause it to start
Predisposed	naturally more likely to get it
Excitants	things believed to cause or worsen the illness

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Broadly	generally
Commentary	spoken or written opinions and discussion
Circulation	the movement of blood around the body
Condemned	strongly criticised
Collarbone	the bone between the shoulder and neck
Waistcoats	sleeveless jackets worn over a shirt
Impurities	dirty or harmful substances
Expelling	pushing out
Revealing	showing it clearly
Morality	beliefs about right and wrong
Prominent	important and well-known
Toxic	poisonous
Dilated	made wider or larger
Exaggerated	made to seem bigger or more important than it really is
Coincided with	happened at the same time as

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Pre-existing	already there before it
Glamorous	attractive and exciting
Rosy	pink and healthy-looking
Sparkly	bright and shining
Consumption	an old name for tuberculosis
Cultivating	trying to develop or create
Aesthetic	particular style or appearance
Pallor	very pale skin
Semi-religious	partly connected to religion
Farewells	goodbye messages
Grieving	people feeling great sadness
Bed-ridden	unable to leave bed because of illness
Luminous	glowing or shining softly
Serenity	calmness and peace
Leisured	having plenty of free time and money

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Gad about	to go around socially without serious purpose
Workhouse	a place where very poor people lived and worked
Unmarked grave	a grave without a name or sign
Dismissed	rejected as wrong or unimportant
Germ theory	the idea that germs cause disease
Organisms	living things
Naked eye	normal human sight without tools
Preceding	happening before
Isolate	separate it from other things
In culture	in a laboratory
Conclusively	in a way that proved it completely
Hereditary	passed down through families
Waxy	smooth and slightly oily, like wax
Outer coat	outside layer
Penetrate	get through or enter

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Sanitarium	a hospital for long-term illness, especially tuberculosis
Specialised	designed for this particular purpose
Flourished	grew or spread successfully
Defences	the body's way of fighting illness
Supervision	being watched and cared for
Relapse	become ill again after getting better
Smog	dirty air caused by smoke and pollution
Administered	officially given
Eliminate	completely remove
Microorganisms	tiny living things only visible with a microscope
Reasoning	thinking carefully to reach a conclusion
Critically ill	extremely sick
Miraculously	in a surprising and wonderful way
Disbelief	rejection or inability to believe it
Wards	sections of a hospital

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All but	almost completely
Sub-saharan	relating to the area south of the Sahara Desert in Africa
Overcrowding	having too many people in one place
Considerably	a lot
Drug-resistant	not affected by medicines anymore
Courses	full periods of medical treatment
Interrupted	stopped before finishing
Evolve	change slowly over time
Regimens	planned courses of medical treatment
Side effects	unwanted results from medicine or treatment
Established	clearly proved or accepted

Language spotlight

1. Eking out

- **Meaning:** Managing to live with very little money or resources.
- **Synonyms:** getting by, surviving, scraping by
- **Antonyms:** living comfortably, thriving, prospering
- **Examples:**
 - Many farming families were **eking out** a living during the dry summer.
 - She worked two jobs just to **eke out** enough money to pay the rent.

2. Wasting away

- **Meaning:** Becoming thinner, weaker, and less healthy over time.
- **Synonyms:** weakening, fading, declining
- **Antonyms:** recovering, strengthening, improving
- **Examples:**
 - The old dog was slowly **wasting away** because it refused to eat.
 - After months in bed, he looked like he was **wasting away**.

3. Springing up

- **Meaning:** Appearing or being built quickly in many places.
- **Synonyms:** appearing, growing quickly, popping up
- **Antonyms:** disappearing, closing down, vanishing
- **Examples:**
 - New cafés are **springing up** all over the city centre.
 - During the gold rush, small towns began **springing up** near the mines.

4. Bound to

- **Meaning:** Certain or very likely to happen.
- **Synonyms:** certain to, sure to, likely to
- **Antonyms:** unlikely to, doubtful to, uncertain to
- **Examples:**
 - If you practise every day, you are **bound to** improve your English.
 - With those dark clouds, it's **bound to** rain soon.

5. All but

- **Meaning:** Almost completely.
- **Synonyms:** nearly, practically, almost entirely
- **Antonyms:** hardly, barely, not at all
- **Examples:**
 - The small village was **all but** destroyed by the flood.
 - By midnight, the stadium was **all but** empty.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What happened to John Keats in the winter of 1820?
 - a) He published a famous poem
 - b) He discovered a cure for tuberculosis
 - c) He coughed up blood and realised he had tuberculosis
 - d) He travelled to the mountains for treatment

2. Why did tuberculosis spread rapidly during the Industrial Revolution?
 - a) People began travelling overseas more often
 - b) Cities became crowded and unhealthy
 - c) People were very poor
 - d) People stopped wearing warm clothes

3. What was one reason sanitariums were built in mountains or near the sea?
 - a) Land was cheaper there

The Deadly History of Tuberculosis

- b) Patients preferred holiday locations
- c) Cities banned tuberculosis hospitals
- d) Doctors believed fresh air could help patients recover

4. According to the episode, why did some wealthy people romanticise tuberculosis?

- a) It was associated with artistic sensitivity and beauty
- b) It only affected poets and writers
- c) It could easily be cured
- d) It mainly affected rich people

5. What major discovery did Robert Koch make in 1882?

- a) He invented the BCG vaccine
- b) He created the first antibiotic
- c) He discovered the bacterium that causes tuberculosis
- d) He built the first sanitarium

The Deadly History of Tuberculosis

True or False

6. Tuberculosis mainly spread in open, well-ventilated spaces. (True/False)
7. Victorian doctors originally believed tuberculosis was contagious. (True/False)
8. The BCG vaccine completely eliminated tuberculosis around the world.
(True/False)
9. Around a quarter of the world's population is estimated to have latent tuberculosis today. (True/False)
10. Streptomycin was the first successful antibiotic treatment for tuberculosis.
(True/False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. Streets so narrow that sunlight barely reached the ground. This was the perfect _____ ground for tuberculosis.
12. The infected person will typically cough up blood and feel _____ of breath.
13. Factory workers dying alone in a crowded apartment, children dying in a workhouse, buried in an unmarked _____.

The Deadly History of Tuberculosis

14. This was the idea that many diseases were caused by specific living organisms, invisible to the _____ eye, that invaded the body and reproduced within it.
15. ...a disease that was ____ its peak responsible for one in four deaths in Europe, and still kills more than a million people per year today.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What is the closest meaning of “**overcrowding**”?

- a) Having too few people
- b) Having too many people in one place
- c) Living in the countryside
- d) Building new homes quickly

17. What is the meaning of “**predisposition**”?

- a) A natural tendency to develop something
- b) A strong dislike of something
- c) A medical treatment

d) A type of infection

18. What does “**succumbed**” mean in the sentence “before the body finally succumbed”?

a) Became stronger

b) Recovered completely

c) Gave in or died from illness

d) Escaped from danger

19. What does “**relapse**” mean?

a) To become ill again after improving

b) To discover a cure

c) To move to another city

d) To begin exercising regularly

20. What is the closest meaning of “**regimen**” in the phrase “more expensive regimens”?

- a) Decorations
- b) Medical treatment plans
- c) Research laboratories
- d) Vaccination campaigns

Answers

1. c) He coughed up blood and realised he had tuberculosis
2. b) Cities became crowded and unhealthy
3. d) Doctors believed fresh air could help patients recover
4. a) It was associated with artistic sensitivity and beauty
5. c) He discovered the bacterium that causes tuberculosis
6. False
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. True
11. breeding
12. short
13. grave
14. naked
15. at
16. b) Having too many people in one place
17. a) A natural tendency to develop something
18. c) Gave in or died from illness
19. a) To become ill again after improving
20. b) Medical treatment plans