



American Expression E1761 Take its toll

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The phrase "take its toll" is an idiomatic expression that is commonly used in English to describe the cumulative negative effects or consequences of a particular action, situation, or circumstance over time. It conveys the idea that repeated or prolonged exposure to something can result in physical, emotional, or mental strain and can lead to various adverse outcomes.

The origin of the phrase can be traced back to the concept of toll roads or toll bridges, where travelers were required to pay a fee for using a specific route. Over time, this idea of paying a price or cost became metaphorical, referring to the toll that challenging or demanding experiences can exact on an individual's well-being or resources.

"Take its toll" is often used in contexts where individuals or groups face prolonged stress, hardship, or difficult circumstances. For example, the demands of a high-pressure job with long working hours can take a toll on an individual's physical health and mental well-being. Similarly, a protracted and contentious legal battle can take its toll on the emotional and financial resources of those involved.

The phrase highlights the idea that repeated exposure to stressors or adverse conditions can lead to a gradual deterioration in a person's physical or mental health. This deterioration can manifest in various ways, including physical exhaustion, fatigue, anxiety, depression, or burnout. Essentially, "take its toll" emphasizes the wear and tear that challenging experiences can inflict on an individual's overall quality of life.

"Take its toll" can also be used in broader societal or environmental contexts. For instance, the constant emissions of green house gases can take a toll on the planet's climate, resulting in global warming and its associated consequences, such as rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Similarly, the overuse of natural resources can take its toll on the environment, leading to issues like deforestation, habitat loss, and declining biodiversity.

In personal relationships, the phrase can describe the strain that long-term stressors, conflicts, or challenges can place on a partnership or friendship. A couple facing financial difficulties, for example, may find that the financial stress takes its toll on their relationship, leading to increased tension and disagreements.

It's important to recognize that while "take its toll" typically describes negative consequences, it can also be applied to situations where positive or enriching experiences have a cumulative effect. For example, years of hard work and dedication to a skill or craft can take its toll by resulting in mastery and expertise.

In summary, "take its toll" is an idiomatic expression used to describe the gradual and cumulative negative effects or consequences of prolonged exposure to challenging situations, stressors, or adverse conditions. It emphasizes the notion that repeated experiences can lead to physical, emotional, or mental strain and deterioration. This phrase serves as a reminder of the importance of managing and addressing stressors and challenges to maintain one's well-being and resilience in the face of adversity.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can individuals recognize the early signs that a challenging situation or circumstance is starting to "take its toll" on their physical or mental well-being, and what steps can be taken to mitigate its effects?
2. Are there common coping strategies or resilience-building techniques that people employ to withstand the toll of chronic stress or adversity in their lives?
3. In what ways can society and communities provide support to individuals and families who may be experiencing the toll of prolonged challenges, such as economic hardship or health crises?
4. Can you share a personal or societal example where the cumulative effects of a situation "taking its toll" led to a significant turning point or prompted a change in behavior or policy?
5. How does the phrase "take its toll" relate to the broader concept of the cost or consequences of human actions on the environment, and what can be done to address and mitigate these tolls on the planet?