

# English Idioms in Use

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2002  
Third printing 2003

Printed in Italy by G. Canale & C. S.p.A

*Typeface* Sabon 10/12pt. *System* QuarkXPress® [OD&I]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

ISBN 0 521 78957 5 paperback

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## A Idioms describing health

Mark had been feeling under the weather<sup>1</sup> for weeks. One day he came into work looking like death warmed up<sup>2</sup> and so we told him to go away for a few days to recharge his batteries<sup>3</sup>. After one day beside the sea, he no longer felt off-colour<sup>4</sup> and by the second day he knew he was on the road to recovery<sup>5</sup>. He sent us a postcard and we were all glad to learn that he was on the mend<sup>6</sup>. By the end of the week, he returned to work as fit as a fiddle<sup>7</sup>. And he's been as right as rain<sup>8</sup> ever since.

<sup>1</sup> not very well

<sup>2</sup> looking extremely ill

<sup>3</sup> do something to gain fresh energy and enthusiasm

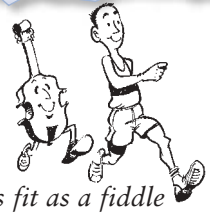
<sup>4</sup> felt unwell

<sup>5</sup> getting better

<sup>6</sup> getting better

<sup>7</sup> perfectly well

<sup>8</sup> perfectly well



as fit as a fiddle

## B Informal idioms for mad

There are many informal idioms which are used to say that someone is mad:

He's not all there.

She's a basket case.

She's off her trolley.

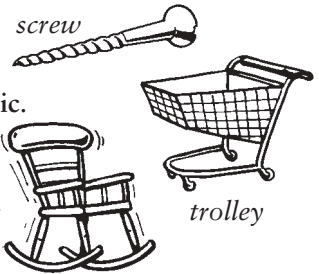
He's off his rocker.

He's not right in the head.

She's one sandwich short of a picnic.

She's got a screw loose.

He's as nutty as a fruitcake.



## C Informal idioms for die

There are also a lot of very informal idioms meaning *die*, for example:

She's popped her clogs.

She's given up the ghost.

She's kicked the bucket.

He's bitten the dust.

He's fallen off his perch.

## D Idioms based on medical images

idiom	meaning	example
a sore point/spot	a subject which someone would prefer not to talk about because it makes them angry or embarrassed	Try not to mention baldness while he's here – it's a sore spot for him.
give someone a taste/dose of their own medicine	do the same bad thing to someone that they have done to you in order to show them how unpleasant it is	Refusing to lend him money now would give him a taste of his own medicine – he's never lent you any.
a bitter pill to swallow	unpleasant, but has to be accepted	Losing my job was initially a bitter pill to swallow.
sugar the pill	do something to make something unpleasant more acceptable	The boss has sugared the overtime pill by offering a large extra payment.
have itchy feet	want to travel or move on	I can't stay in one place for more than a year without getting itchy feet.

## Exercises

- 1.1** Put these expressions into four groups of idioms that share the same meaning. (There are two groups of two idioms and two groups of four.) Explain the meaning in each case.

give up the ghost    be on the road to recovery    bite the dust    be on the mend  
 be as nutty as a fruitcake    feel off-colour    be not all there    feel under the weather  
 pop your clogs    be off your trolley    fall off your perch    be a basket case

- 1.2** Complete each of these idioms.

- Don't mention the merger to him – it's a bit of a ..... spot for him.
- Telling Joe what you feel may be a ..... pill for him to swallow, but you owe it to him nevertheless.
- Watching travel programmes on TV always gives me ..... feet.
- I wonder what's happened to Stan – he looks like death ..... up!
- Plans to put increased funds into education are supposed to sugar the ..... of increased taxation.
- Imagine someone as unfit as Ruth going on holiday in the Himalayas. She must have a ..... loose.
- A good game of golf at the weekend always helps to ..... my father's batteries.
- Tom was quite ill for a while last year, but he's as fit as a ..... now.
- I was exhausted when I got home from work, but, after a nice cup of tea, I'm as ..... as rain.
- Helen won't understand the problem – she's one ..... short of a picnic.

- 1.3** Which of the idioms meaning *die* do these pictures make you think of?



- 1.4** Match each statement on the left with the most likely response on the right.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 I've got itchy feet.                           | Oh dear, I hope he's OK tomorrow.           |
| 2 He's as right as rain now.                     | Yes, but she'll soon get over it.           |
| 3 He's not right in the head.                    | Where would you like to go?                 |
| 4 I'm going to tell him what I think of him.     | That is a relief!                           |
| 5 Dad's a bit off-colour today.                  | Good. Give him a dose of his own medicine.  |
| 6 Failing the exam was a bitter pill to swallow. | I know, Jane told me he was off his rocker. |

**FOLLOW UP**

Why do you think there are so many idiomatic expressions meaning *mad* and *die*? Is it the same in your language? Do you think it would ever be appropriate for you to use any of these English idioms for *mad* or *die*? If so, in what circumstances? If not, why not?