

# Metaphors and idioms

## 10 Idioms about the human body

**Head start**  
An advantage over everyone else

**Sight for sore eyes**  
A sight that makes you happy

**A weight off your shoulders**  
You no longer worry about something or deal with something difficult

**Pain in the neck**  
Someone or something making your life difficult

**Gut feeling**  
A sense or impression that your subconscious has about a person or situation

**Hands are tied**  
You are prevented from doing something. It is not within your power

**Joined at the hip**  
To be exceptionally close to someone

**Weak at the knees**  
To feel emotion so strongly that it makes you feel unstable on your feet

**Achilles heel**  
A weakness that can result in failure

**Find your feet**  
To adjust to a new place or situation

# Body

# Some Body Idioms

## (An) old hand

- **an experienced person**

*Example:* My uncle's an old hand at car repair. He'll know what the problem is.

## Over my dead body

- **not unless I'm dead!**

*Example:* My daughter wants a tattoo. I told her she'd get one over my dead body.

## Pat on the back

- **recognition or a thank-you**

*Example:* The party organisers deserve a pat on the back for a job well done.

## *Play something by ear*

- **do something without a plan**

**Example:** We don't know if the weather will be good enough for camping. We'll have to **play it by ear**.

## *Pull one's leg*

- **joke or tease someone**

**Example:** I was just **pulling your leg**. I'm not really a police officer.

## *Rule of thumb*

- **basic rule (not always followed)**

**Example:** The **rule of thumb** is that the students should attend 80% of their lessons

## *Cost an arm and a leg*

- **be very expensive**

*Example:* These cakes are delicious, but they cost an arm and a leg.

## *Cry your heart out*

- **cry very hard**

*Example:* I cried my heart out when my best friend moved away.

## *Face the music*

- **meet the consequences, no matter how unpleasant they may be**

*Example:* When I eventually got home I had to face the music from my parents.



# All ears

- fully listening

*Example:* Give me a minute to finish my work and then I'll be **all ears** to hear about your project.

# Break a leg

- good-luck

*Example:* Good luck for the performance! **Break a leg!**

# Cold feet

- nervous just before a big event

*Example:* My sister didn't get **cold feet** until she put her wedding gown on.

## Get something off one's chest

- tell someone your problems

**Example:** Thanks for listening to me complain about my boss. I just needed to **get it off my chest**.

## Give a hand, lend a hand

- help (someone) do something

**Example:** I can **give you a hand** when you move house if you like.

## Have one's head in the clouds

- be unaware or unrealistic about something

**Example:** Amy **has her head in the clouds** if she thinks she's going to pass her exams without studying.

## head over heels

- deeply in love

*Example:* My brother is **head over heels** for his new girlfriend.

## head start

- an earlier start

*Example:* The kids gave Anthony a **head start** in the bicycle race because he was the youngest.

## in over one's head

- taking on a task that you can't handle

*Example:* I was **in over my head** when I agreed to babysit the triplets and the dogs.

# Keep an eye on

- take care of, watch in order to protect

**Example:** I'll keep an eye on the dinner while you're on the phone.

# Keep one's chin up

- try to be cheerful

**Example:** Keep your chin up. I'm sure you'll make some friends soon.

# Learn by heart, know by heart

- Memorise

**Example:** I learned English grammar by heart.

# Let one's hair down

- relax, have fun

**Example:** Go to the cottage and let your hair down this weekend.



*(my) lips are sealed*

- promise to keep a secret

**Example:** Don't worry, I won't tell your husband how much you spent.

**My lips are sealed.**

*makes my blood boil*

- makes me very angry

**Example:** It **makes my blood boil** when people don't clean up after their dogs.

*neck of the wood*

- nearby location or region

**Example:** I heard that they might be opening a post office in our **neck of the woods** soon.

## *see eye to eye*

- Agree

**Example:** The couple don't see eye to eye on how to train their pets.

## *(by the) skin of one's teeth*

- just barely

**Example:** I passed my exam by the skin of my teeth.

## *stick your neck out*

- help someone a lot, with possible bad consequences for oneself

**Example:** I stuck my neck out for Bessie when she was in trouble.

## *Sweet tooth*

- a love of sugar or sweet things

Ex: I need three spoonfuls of sugar in my tea. I have a **sweet tooth**.

## *Thick in the head*

- not very intelligent

Ex: I'm a bit **thick in the head** when it comes to reading a map.

## *Wash one's hands of something*

- stop dealing with an issue or problem

Ex: I'm **washing my hands of** Mary's addiction. She is going to have to get some professional help.

# Exercises ! Good Luck

- a) It was such a sad movie that **I Cried My Heart Out**  
1. Faced The Music 2. Got Cold Feet 3. Was In Over My Head 4. I Cried My Heart Out
- b) I cut my own hair because the hairdresser costs **An Arm and an leg.**  
1. Pull one's leg 2. Break a leg 3. An arm and a leg 4. An old hand
- c) **Keep you chin up** someone will find your kitten.  
1. My Lips Are Sealed 2. See eye to eye 3. Stick your neck out 4. Keep Your Chin Up
- d) I love chocolate. I have a sweet **Tooth.**  
1. Mouth 2. Taste 3. Tongue  
4. Tooth
- e) I'm just **pulling** your leg. I didn't really dye my hair blue.  
1. Eating 2. catching 3. Cutting 4. Pulling
- f) On the weekends I like to drink wine and **Let my hair Down**  
1. Get a head start 2. Get off my chest 3. Keep an eye on 4. Let my hair down

# Continue Exercises...

a) Let's get together in my **Neck** of the woods for once.

1. Head 2. Neck 3. Hand 4. Foot

b) We're going away for the week. Can you keep **An eye** on our house?

1. Your Chin 2. An eye 3. A hair 4. A foot

c) It makes my **blood boil** when people are rude.

1. Hair grow 2. Teeth ache 3. Mouth drop 4. Blood boil

d) I wish I knew his phone number by **Heart**.

1. Mind 2. Heart 3. Nose 4. Eyes

# Body Idioms

Idiom

Meaning

stick your neck out

help someone a lot, with possible bad consequences for oneself

sweet tooth

a love of sugar or sweet things

to break your back.

to work extremely hard

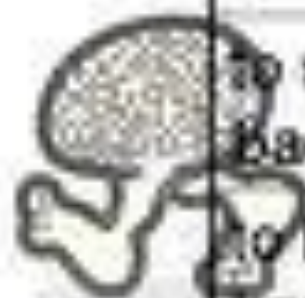
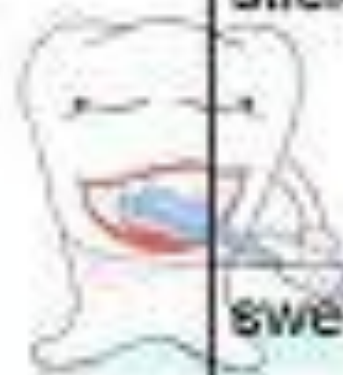
to scratch someone's back.

to offer to help someone if they help you.

to be all brawn and no brain.

to be physically strong but not very intelligent.

Sweet  
Tooth



# Bone Idioms

## *as dry as a bone*

- very dry

**Example:** The river bed was as dry as a bone at the end of the summer.

## *a bone of contention*

- something that people disagree about

**Example:** The issue of working on Saturday evenings is a bone of contention between the shop and the workers.

## *down to the bone*

- entirely, to the core

**Example:** The rain and snow chilled me right down to the bone.

## *know (something) in one's bones*

- to know and sense something, to have an intuition about something

**Example:** I know it in my bones that I am not going to pass my English exam.

# Breathe/Breath Idioms

## *Able to breathe easily again*

- to be able to relax after a busy and stressful time

**Example:** I was able to breathe easily again when I knew that I would not miss my flight.

## *At the top of one's lungs*

- with a very loud voice

**Example:** I yelled at the top of my lungs to get the man's attention.

## *Not breathe a word (about someone or something)*

- to keep a secret about someone or something

**Example:** "Please don't breathe a word about my new job to my supervisor."

## *Breathe one's last*

- to die, to breathe one's last breath before dying

**Example:** The elderly man breathed his last late yesterday evening.

## *Don't hold your breath.*

- Don't stop breathing to wait for something (because it will never happen).

**Example:** "Don't hold your breath," I said when my friend asked when he would be able to borrow our friend's car.



# Neck Idioms

## **breathe down (someone`s) neck**

- to watch someone closely (often by standing right behind them), to pressure someone to do something

**Example:** My boss has been breathing down my neck all day to pressure me to finish the report.

## **dead from the neck up**

- to be very stupid

**Ex:** My boss seems to be dead from the neck up.

## **a millstone around (someone's) neck**

- a burden or handicap for someone

**Ex:** My parents' house is a millstone around their neck and they want to sell it

## **a pain in the neck**

- an annoying or bothersome person or event

**Ex:** Our customer is a pain in the neck and is always complaining about something.

## **save (someone`s) neck/skin**

- to save someone from danger or trouble or embarrassment

**Ex:** The worker tried to save his own neck without thinking about other people.

# SHOULDER IDIOMS

## have a chip on one's shoulder

- to have a tendency to try to get into a conflict with others

**Example:** Our supervisor has a chip on his shoulder and is not an easy person to work with.

## look over one's shoulder

- to be worried that something dangerous or bad may happen to you

**Ex:** I always look over my shoulder when I am walking alone at night.

## put one's shoulder to the wheel

- to get busy and do some work

**Ex:** We must put our shoulders to the wheel and get our work done early.

## a shoulder to cry on

- someone to whom you can tell your problems to and then ask for sympathy and advice

**Ex:** I gave my friend a shoulder to cry on when her boyfriend dumped her.

## straight from the shoulder

- an open and honest way of speaking

**Ex:** The manager was speaking straight from the shoulder when he told the workers about the factory closing.

# Skin Idioms

## get under (someone`s) skin

- to bother or irritate someone

**Example:** My neighbor is beginning to get under my skin with her constant complaining.

## jump out of one`s skin

- to be badly frightened, to be very surprised

**Example:** I almost jumped out of my skin when I saw my boyfriend at the movie theater with another girl.

## skin-deep

- on the surface only, not having any deep or honest meaning

**Example:** I believe that the speaker's interest in the environment is only skin-deep.

## save (someone`s) skin

- to save someone from danger or trouble or embarrassment

**Example:** The worker tried to save his own skin without thinking about other people.

## thin-skinned

- easily upset or hurt, very sensitive

**Example:** My friend is thin-skinned and is always upset about something that someone says to her.

# Stomach Idioms

## can't stomach (someone or something)

- to dislike someone or something very much

**Example:** I cannot stomach the new woman who I work with.

## eyes are bigger than one's stomach/belly

- taking more food than one can eat

**Example:** My eyes were bigger than my belly when I went to the buffet table and took too much food.

## turn (someone`s) stomach

- to make someone feel sick, to disgust someone

**Example:** The sight of the dead dog on the road turned my stomach.

## not have the stomach for (something)

- to have no desire to do something because you think that it is unpleasant or wrong

**Example:** I do not have the stomach to talk with my friend about his work and financial problems.

# Sweat Idioms

## break into a cold sweat (about something)

- to become nervous or frightened about something

**Example:** I broke into a cold sweat when I went to tell my teacher about my mistake.

## by the sweat of one's brow

- by one's hard work or effort

**Example:** The restaurant owner built his business by the sweat of his brow.

## sweat blood

- to be very anxious and tense about something

**Example:** I began to sweat blood when I heard that some of our staff may be transferred to another city.

## blood, sweat, and tears

- great personal effort

**Example:** We put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into fixing our old

# Body Idioms



Idiom

Meaning

(an) old hand

an experienced person

toe the line

to conform to certain rules or standards.

pat on the back

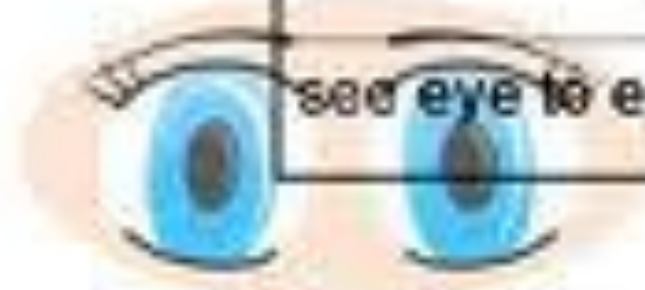
recognition or a thank-you

pull one's leg

joke or tease someone

see eye to eye

agree



# Exercises

❖ Choose an idiom to replace the expression in the brackets:

1. There is a lot of (~~big~~) **blood between my friend and myself.**

(a) new blood (b) bad blood (c) flesh and blood (d) blood, sweat, and tears

2. The woman (~~refused to help~~) **on her son when he lost his job and needed some money.**

(a) turned her back on (b) sweat it out for (c) got off the back of (d) put her shoulder to the wheel for

3. **When I saw the dead horse it** (~~turned my stomach~~)

(a) made my blood boil (b) scratched my back (c) turned my stomach (d) grated on my nerves

4. I cried out (~~at the top of my lungs~~) **to stop the child from running into the street.**

(a) all in one breath (b) in the flesh (c) straight from the shoulder (d) at the top of my lungs

5. It was wet and cold out so when I returned home I was wet (~~throughout~~) **my body).**

(a) shoulder to shoulder (b) neck and neck (c) to the bone (d) behind my back

**6. The woman is (~~breaking her neck~~) to finish painting her house before it rains.**

(a) breaking into a cold sweat (b) out for blood (c) getting under my skin (d) breaking her neck

**7. My supervisor (~~suddenly became angry at me~~) when I was late for the meeting.**

(a) jumped down my throat (b) jumped out of her skin (c) took my breath away (d) risked her neck

**8. There was a scandal in the company and the president quickly tried to (~~protect himself~~).**

(a) save his breath (b) save his neck (c) cut a fine figure (d) throw his weight around

**9. The girl never eats and is (~~skin and bones~~).**

(a) skin-deep (b) broad in the beam (c) skin and bones (d) a bundle of nerves

**10. My friend never wants to (~~do anything extra outisiky~~) to help others.**

(a) stick his neck out (b) get his back up (c) waste his breath (d) press the flesh

**11. He is (~~hutting his own throates~~) if he does not take a training course with the other members of the group.**

(a) busting a gut (b) venting his spleen (c) thin-skinned (d) cutting his own throat





**12. The man at the video store is (~~an pain in the neck~~).**

- (a) a pain in the neck
- (b) a pat on the back
- (c) a stab in the back
- (d) a breath of fresh air

**13. The other runners were (~~following closely behind me~~) during the marathon.**

- (a) holding my breath
- (b) out of breath
- (c) breathing down my neck
- (d) sweating blood

**14. He gave me (~~unfriendly treatment~~) when I saw him at the restaurant.**

- (a) time to catch my breath
- (b) the cold shoulder
- (c) a bone of contention
- (d) a shoulder to cry on

**15. I do not want to have his resignation from the company (~~on my shoulders~~).**

- (a) off my chest
- (b) over my dead body
- (c) in my blood
- (d) on my shoulders

**16. My father is always (~~pressing me~~) to help him clean up the yard at home.**

- (a) pulling his weight
- (b) splitting his sides with laughter
- (c) on my back
- (d) covering his back

**17. The car at the showroom is (~~too expensive for me~~).**

- (a) chilled to the bone
- (b) too rich for my blood
- (c) a kink in my neck
- (d) a millstone around my neck

**18. The woman who I work with has many habits that ~~get on my~~ nerves.**

(a) have my words stick in my throat (b) give me the shirt off her back (c) land in my lap (d) get on my nerves

**19. The two boys were ~~at fighting~~ at their's throats all morning.**

(a) at each other's throats (b) back-to-back (c) soaked to the skin (d) head and shoulders above each other

**20. I spent several days ~~putting flesh on~~ my proposal for the new children's playground.**

a) saying something under my breath for (b) making a clean breast of (c) drawing blood for (d) putting flesh on

**21. When I finally discovered that I had passed the university entrance exam I was able to ~~breath~~ breathe easy**

(a) huff and puff (b) breathe easy (c) shoot from the hip (d) breathe my last

**22. I was ~~up to my ears with~~ up to my ears with work last night so I could not go to a movie.**

(a) not breathing a word about (b) wetting my whistle with (c) up to my ears in (d) dead from the neck up with

# Body Idioms

Idiom

Meaning

keep an eye on

take care of, watch in order to protect

learn by heart, know by heart

memorize

let one's hair down

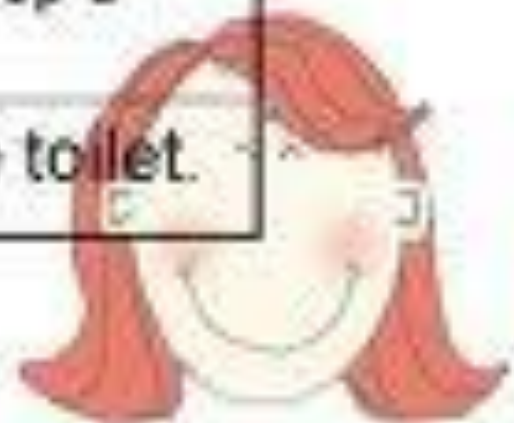
relax, have fun

(my) lips are sealed

promise to keep a secret

to powder your nose.

going to the toilet.



# Match them:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Chip on the shoulder                 | a. Be in the mood for a tough argument, encounter.   |
| 2. Get it off your chest                | b. Be involved with many projects simultaneously.    |
| 3. Have the stomach for a fight         | c. Be sensible, wise, reasonable.                    |
| 4. Have your finger in many pies.       | d. Disaster, catastrophe                             |
| 5. Have your head in the clouds         | e. Have a superior attitude towards others.          |
| 6. Have your head screwed on (straight) | f. Lead/advantage                                    |
| 7. Head over heels in love              | g. Listen out for news about something               |
| 8. Pig's ear                            | h. Try and stay happy and think positively           |
| 9. Head start                           | i. Negative attitude towards something for no reason |
| 10. Keep your chin up                   | j. Not to concentrate, dream about something else.   |
| 11. Keep your ear to the ground         | k. Something said only to be polite and keep someone |
| 12. Lip service                         | l. Talk to someone to about problem you have         |
| 13. Look down your nose at people       | m. Totally in love with someone                      |

ANSWER: (1;i) , (2;l) , (3;a) , (4;b) , (5;j) , (6;c) , (7;m) , (8;d) , (9;f) , (10;h) , (11,g) , (12;k) , (13;e)

# Idioms

## Off the top of your head

- Making an approximate guess

**Example:** Off the top of my head I can tell you how many people are in the room.

## Roll your eyes

- Show that you are bored or disapprove

**Example:** When she repeatedly spoke about her daughter's dancing, we all rolled our eyes.

## Down in the mouth

- In low spirits

**Example:** She is always down in the mouth when her boyfriend stays out late with his friends.

## Buttons yours lip

- Don't let the secret out

**Example:** Don't tell anyone about this. Button your lips

## Lend me your ear

- Listen to me

**Example:** Could you lend me an ear for a minute?

## Under your nose

- Clearly seen by everyone

**Ex:** The robbers robbed the bank under everybody's nose.

## Lose your heart to

- Fall in love with

**Ex:** Janet has lost her heart to Ben.

## Pull someone's leg

- Trick or joke with someone

**Ex:** Linda said she wants to marry Nick, but it wasn't true. She was pulling our leg.

## Drag your feet

- Work very slowly

**Ex:** They are supposed to finish painting the room by six, but obviously they won't. They are dragging their feet.

# Exercises:

## □ Match the idioms with their definitions :

- |                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Lend me your ear       | a. Work very slowly         |
| 2. Off the top of my head | b. In plain view            |
| 3. Have a sweet tooth     | c. To fall in love with     |
| 4. Button your lips       | d. Express boredom          |
| 5. Roll your eyes         | e. Making a rough guess     |
| 6. Pull someone's leg     | f. Love to eat sweets       |
| 7. Down in the mouth      | g. Don't let the secret out |
| 8. Under one's nose       | h. Please, listen to me     |
| 9. Lose your heart to     | i. Joke, trick someone      |
| 10. Drag your feet        | j. In low spirits           |

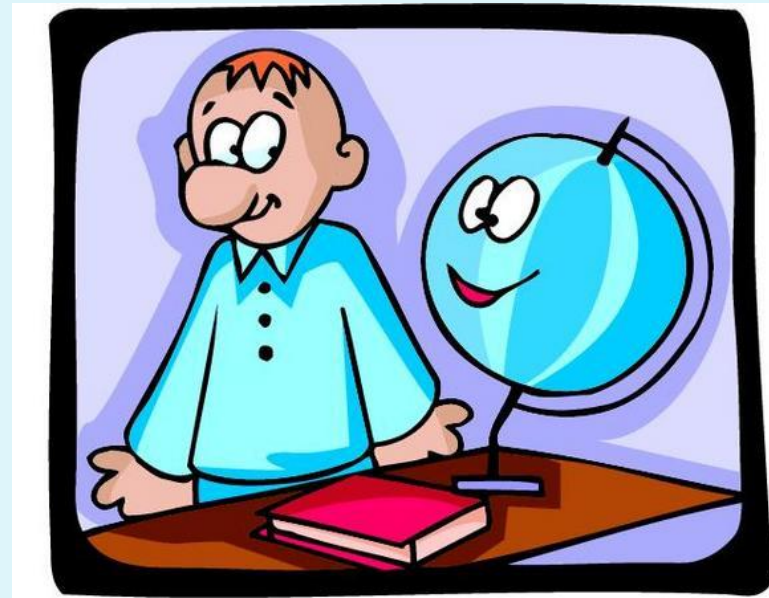
ANSWER: (1.h) , (2.e) , (3.f) , (4.g) , (5.d) , (6.i) , (7.j) , (8.b) , (9.c) , (10.a)

# Exercise:

Finish these idioms with one of the following words:

Lip, head, hair, face, tooth, eyebrows, tongue, ears, shoulder, stomach

- a. My **ears** are burning.
- b. Bite your **tongue**
- c. Keep a stiff upper **lip**
- d. Let one's **hair** down
- e. Cause **eyebrows** to raise
- f. Have a long **face**
- g. One's eyes are bigger than one's **stomach**
- h. Long in the **tooth**
- i. Give someone the cold **shoulder**
- j. Have one's in the clouds **head**





- Fill in the blanks with the following prepositions:  
In, above, on, down, under, with, over, off, out, at

- a. To be head and shoulders **above** others
- b. Have one's head **in** the clouds
- c. Hit the nail **on** the head
- d. **Off** the top of one's head
- e. Be **at** the head of something
- f. Pull the wool **out of** someone's eyes
- g. Cry one's eyes **out**
- h. Breathe **down** one's neck
- i. **With** open arms
- j. **Under** one's nose

