## Contents

Acknowledgements 3  
Using this book 4

### Learning about idioms

i What are idioms?  
ii Using your dictionary

### Idioms to talk about ...

1 Health  
2 Happiness and sadness  
3 Anger  
4 Knowing and understanding  
5 Experience and perception  
6 Success and failure  
7 Having problems  
8 Dealing with problems  
9 Power and authority  
10 Structuring and talking about arguments  
11 Conversational responses  
12 Praise and criticism  
13 Opinions on people and actions  
14 Behaviour and attitudes  
15 Reacting to what others say  
16 Danger  
17 Effort  
18 Necessity and desirability  
19 Probability and luck  
20 Social status  
21 Feelings  
22 Human relationships  
23 Size and position  
24 Money  
25 Work  
26 Speed, distance and intensity  
27 Communication 1: commenting on language  
28 Communication 2: getting the message across  
29 Life and experience: proverbs  
30 Memory

### Idioms from the topic area of ...

31 Time 1: the past and the future  
32 Time 2: clocks and frequency  
33 The elements  
34 Colour  
35 Games and sport  
36 Animals 1: describing people  
37 Animals 2: describing situations  
38 Weapons and war
Idioms using these keywords:

- Finger, thumb, hand
- Foot, heel, toe
- Bones, shoulder, arm, leg
- Head
- Face, hair, neck, chest
- Eyes
- Ear, lips, mouth, nose, teeth, tongue
- Heart
- Brain, mind, blood and guts
- Back
- Long
- Line
- Act, action, activity
- Good and bad
- Ground
- Similes and idioms with *like*

Key  130

List of phonetic symbols  170

Index  171
Health

Idioms describing health

Mark had been feeling under the weather¹ for weeks. One day he came into work looking like death warmed up² and so we told him to go away for a few days to recharge his batteries³. After one day beside the sea, he no longer felt off-colour⁴ and by the second day he knew he was on the road to recovery⁵. He sent us a postcard and we were all glad to learn that he was on the mend⁶. By the end of the week, he returned to work as fit as a fiddle⁷. And he’s been as right as rain⁸ ever since.

¹ not very well  
² looking extremely ill  
³ do something to gain fresh energy and enthusiasm  
⁴ felt unwell  
⁵ getting better  
⁶ getting better  
⁷ perfectly well  
⁸ perfectly well

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.

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.

Idioms based on medical images

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of Two</th>
<th>Group of Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>give up the ghost</td>
<td>be on the road to recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be as nutty as a fruitcake</td>
<td>feel off-colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bite the dust</td>
<td>be not all there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be on the mend</td>
<td>feel under the weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pop your clogs</td>
<td>be off your trolley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fall off your perch</td>
<td>be a basket case</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2 Complete each of these idioms.

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

1.3 Which of the idioms meaning \textit{die} do these pictures make you think of?

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’ve got itchy feet.</td>
<td>Oh dear, I hope he’s OK tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s as right as rain now.</td>
<td>Yes, but she’ll soon get over it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s not right in the head.</td>
<td>Where would you like to go?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to tell him what I think of him.</td>
<td>That is a relief!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad’s a bit off-colour today.</td>
<td>Good. Give him a dose of his own medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing the exam was a bitter pill to swallow.</td>
<td>I know, Jane told me he was off his rocker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Follow Up**
Why do you think there are so many idiomatic expressions meaning \textit{mad} and \textit{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 \textit{mad} or \textit{die}? If so, in what circumstances? If not, why not?