

Hello. I'm Daniel Brint. Welcome to the Upper Street TODAY language talk, a weekly podcast about English language, expressions, idioms and any other topics of interest inspired by TODAY's subject.

National Baking Week happens every October 14 to 20 in the U.K. Pyrex initially started the holiday back in 2007 with other baking companies to inspire people of all abilities to try their hand at baking at home.

There are things you know you don't know. I have a very long list of these but one of them has to be why is the UK deeply obsessed with baking, an obsession so profound that a baking program becomes one of the most watched TV programmes in broadcasting history. I don't live in the UK and that might be part of the reason why I am still flabbergasted as to how a simple kitchen activity has become a massive TV event, and a national concern. Of course, I can research the theories – baking as nostalgia, as challenge, as art, as a culturally shared experience - as innovative escapist TV. But I can't 'know it' as it isn't part of my direct experience.

On the other hand, many of us tried baking during Covid and that is something I did as well. Flour was one of the first things to disappear from supermarket shelves. But I really don't think this was a way to kill time, like tie-dyeing or reading. Perhaps in a time of crisis, we return to basics, and what is more basic to survival than bread.

So, I will make do with baking as a source of English expressions. As Covid kitchens showed us, bread has long been shorthand for survival. After it's respectful address, the first thing the Lord's prayer asks for is bread. Dough and bread have been used as synonyms for money, the 'breadwinner' is the person who earns the family's income, and someone's 'bread and butter' is their principal source of earnings. When I look at baking expressions in general it appears that a fair number pick up on this association and focus on good fortune.

An ideal situation is one where you can 'have your cake and eat it,' a double advantage. The term was infamously spotted on a British minister's notepad following a Brexit meeting in the days when the lunacy of Brexit was still being seen through deluded eyes as a *really good thing*. The icing on the cake is similar in that it something desirable on top of something already meeting your expectations. A piece of cake (vulgarized as a piece of piss) is something achieved effortlessly. In the commercial world a popular product *sells like hotcakes*. An item's popularity can be somewhat ironically described as 'the greatest thing since sliced bread.'

Fortune has its flipside and we find a number of expressions related to mistakes, chance and challenge. A *half-baked* plan or idea doesn't work because it is flawed in preparation or execution. Sometimes things are beyond our control, what happens depends on '*the way the cookie crumbles*.' Some who resists persuasion is a '*tough cookie*' and if you want to avoid trouble you had better know *which side your bread is buttered on* and take the right side when you are forced to choose.

I don't find bread expression linked to anticipation. But I did read an interview with a British baking club member (who I imagine will be busy this week) explaining the following with almost religious intensity:

There is instant interaction as soon as you slice into a cake, If a cake is completely covered in frosting, you have no idea what's inside; the moment you slice it, it's suddenly revealed. There's so much engagement with the 'oohs and aahs,' and 'Isn't it amazing?' "

There are, indeed, things you know you do not know. But there are also times when you really don't need to know them.

Well, that's all for now. I hope you enjoyed this talk and that you will join me again next week. If you have any comments or would like a transcript, please contact me at [admin@upperstreet.es](mailto:admin@upperstreet.es).

Thanks a lot.

### **Mistakes and chance**

Half-baked  
Tough cookie  
The way the cookie crumbles

### **Good fortune**

Have your cake and eat it  
The icing on the cake  
Piece of cake  
Sell like hotcakes  
The greatest thing since sliced bread

(2013)

The first rule of cake club is: You ONLY talk about cake.

The second rule of cake club is: Try as many cakes as possible.

OK, so the members of Britain's Clandestine Cake Club may not be pugilistic like those of Chuck Palahniuk's fictional Fight Club, but they're just as hard-core about their chosen obsession. Just listen to founder Lynn Hill:

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