ENGLISH IDIOMS WITH BODY PARTS

Both American and British English use idioms that use parts of the body to explain ideas. Often these phrases don’t have anything to do with the body, but the idioms express these thoughts easily. I hope this idiom compilation will help to enrich your English vocabulary!

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| Body part | Expression | Meaning | Example of use |
| arm | long arm of the law | Describes how efficient the law system can be. |  “Tony was caught by the police for speeding. He could not escape the long arm of the law.” |
| arm | to cost an arm and a leg | to be very expensive |  That shirt from Hermes costs an arm and a leg! |
| arm | to keep at arm’s length | to avoid being connected to someone or something |  I didn’t trust her, so I kept her at arm’s length. |
| arm | Use strong arm tactic |  |  |
| back | pat on the back | recognition or a thank-you | The party organizers deserve a pat on the back for a job well done. |
| back | To back a team/employees | To support a team/employees |  |
| blood | blood is thicker than water | Family members stick together no matter what one of them has done | My daughter sometimes annoys me but blood is thicker than water |
| blood | makes my blood boil | makes me very angry | It makes my blood boil when people don't tie up their dogs. |
| blood | my flesh and blood | relative | I have to hire Mia. She's my own flesh and blood. |
| body | over my dead body | not unless I'm dead and can't stop you | My daughter wants a tattoo. I told her she'd get one over my dead body. |
| Brain | **beat one's brains out** | If someone beats their brains out, they try very hard to understand something or solve a problem. | "My grandmother***beats her brains out***every evening trying to do the crossword puzzle in the newspaper." |
| Brain | **brain like a sieve** | Someone who has abrain like a sieve has a very bad memory and forgets things easily.  | "Oh, I forgot to buy the bread - I've got a***brain like a sieve***these days!" |
| Brain | **all brawn and no brain** | Someone who is physically very strong but not very intelligent is said to be all brawn and no brain.  | "He's an impressive player to watch, but he's***all brawn and no brain.***" |
| Brain | **have something on the brain** | If you have something on the brain, you think or talk about it all constantly.  | "Stop talking about golf. You've got golf***on the brain***!" |
| Brain | **a no-brainer** | A decision or choice that requires little or no thought, because the best option is so obvious, is called a no-brainer.  | "The choice was between a cash refund or having the amount credited to my account - it was***a no-brainer***. I took the cash!" |
| Brain | **brains behind something** | Someone who isthe brains behind a project or action is the person thought to have planned and organised everything.  | "The police have arrested a man believed to be the***brains behind***the bank robbery." |
| Brain | **pick someone's brains** | If you pick someone's brains, you ask questions about a particular subject in order to obtain advice or information.  | "Could we have lunch together? I'd like to***pick your brains***about something." |
| Brain | **rack one's brains** | If you rack your brains,you try very hard to think of something or to remember something.  | "Christmas is always a hassle for me. I have to***rack my brains***every year to find ideas for presents." |
| Brain | **wrap your brain around something** | If you concentrate on something in an effort to understand, you wrap your brain around it.  | "I need a translation of this report urgently, so***wrap your brain around it***fast!" |
| chest | get something off one’s chest | to tell someone your problems or frustrations |  Thanks for listening to me complain about my brother. I needed to get it off my chest. |
| chest | Play it close to your chest | To keep one's plans, intentions or tactics secret from everyone else. Refers to holding one’s playing cards to one’s chest in a card game to as no other player can see your hand. | *We’re all curious about what the boss has been discussing in those meetings with the lawyers, but she’s playing it close to her chest.* |
| chest | To put hairs on one’s chest | Make you strong | Here, have a drink of this stuff! It will really put hair on your chest*.* |
| chin | keep one's chin up | try to be cheerful | Keep your chin up. I'm sure you'll make some friends soon. |
| ear | all ears | fully listening |  “I cannot wait to hear what you have to say. I am all ears!” |
| ear | play something by ear | do something without a plan | We don't know if the weather will be good enough for camping. We'll have to play it by ear. |
| ear | are your ears burning | is someone embarrassing you |  |
| elbow | elbow room | To be very crowded |  "I did not like working in that cramped office. There was not enough elbow room!” |
| elbow | Elbow someone out | Push someone to one side |  |
| eye | eye-catching | To catch your attention | “Did you see Candida in her pink dress? She is very eye-catching!” |
| eye | keep an eye on | take care of, watch in order to protect | I'll keep an eye on the dinner while you're on the phone. |
| eye | see eye to eye | agree | The couple don't see eye to eye on how to train their pets. |
| eye | To eye someone up | To look someone over |  |
| eye | to turn a blind eye | To ignored something deliberately | The headmistress turned a blind eye when she saw girls without hats on in town. |
| eye | an eye for an eye |  |  |
| eyelid | don’t bat an eyelid | Pay no attention |  |
| face | face the music | meet, stand up to unpleasant consequences, for example criticism or punishment | I stayed out all night. When I eventually got home I had to face the music from my wife. |
| face | a slap in the face |  |  |
| feet | cold feet | nervous just before a big event | My sister didn't get cold feet until she put her wedding gown on. |
| feet | itchy feet | To move around a lot | “Julie could not wait to go on her travels. She has itchy feet!”  |
| finger | burn one’s fingers |  |  |
| hair | let one's hair down | relax, have fun | Go to the cottage and let your hair down this weekend. |
| hand | an old hand | an experienced person | My uncle's an old hand at car repair. He'll know what the problem is. |
| hand | give someone a hand (with something) | to help someone |  Can you give me a hand with this box? It’s too heavy to carry on my own. |
| hand | lend a hand | help (someone) do something | I can lend you a hand when you move if you like. |
| hand | old hand | To have lots of experience |  “Shirley has been with the bakery for a long time. She is an old hand at making cakes.” |
| hand | wash one's hands of something | stop dealing with an issue or problem | I'm washing my hands of Mary's addiction. She is going to have to get some professional help. |
| hand | on hand or at hand |  |  |
| head | have one's head in the clouds | be unaware or unrealistic about something | Amy has her head in the clouds if she thinks she's going to pass her exams without studying. |
| head | head of a company | Principal officer of a company |  |
| head | head over heels | deeply in love | My brother is head over heels in love with his new girlfriend. |
| head | head start | an earlier start | The kids gave Anthony a head start in the bicycle race because he was the youngest. |
| head | in over one's head | taking on a task that you can't handle | I was in over my head when I agreed to babysit the triplets and the dogs. |
| head | off the top of my head | information offered quickly, without research or calculation |  Off the top of my head, I remember 11 people on the guest list. |
| head | To hit the nail on the head |  |  |
| head | thick in the head | not very intelligent | I'm a bit thick in the head when it comes to reading a map. |
| head | big head |  |  |
| head | come to a head |  |  |
| heart | cry your heart out | cry very hard | I cried my heart out when my best friend moved away. |
| heart | learn by heart, know by heart | memorize | I learned my multiplication tables by heart in the fourth grade. |
| heart | to have a heart of gold |  |  |
| heel | Achilles heel | A weak point |  |
| knee | at your mother’s knee |  |  |
| knee | bring to the knees |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| leg | break a leg | good-luck | Today's the big game, eh? Break a leg! |
| leg | pull one's leg | joke or tease someone | I was just pulling your leg. I'm not really a police officer. |
| leg | leg it | to tell someone to run in order to evade capture, to go away, to get from one place to another on foot, to run fast | I do not have a car, so if I want to get anywhere I have to **leg it.**  |
| lip | my lips are sealed | promise to keep a secret | Don't worry, I won't tell your mother how much you spent. My lips are sealed. |
| mouth | To be down in the mouth | To be depressed |  |
| mouth | big mouth |  |  |
| mouth | To mouth the words | To say something with your lips and tongue but without emiting any sound  |  |
| muscle | To muscle you way into someplace | Push your way in |  |
| neck | neck of the woods | nearby location or region | I heard that they might be opening a post office in our neck of the woods soon. |
| neck | stick your neck out | help someone a lot, with possible bad consequences for oneself | I stuck my neck out for Bessie when she was thrown out of her house. |
| neck | to stick one’s neck out | to take a risk |  I stuck my neck out when I bought that antique rug. I hope it's worth more money later on!  |
| neck | **break one’s neck (to do something)** | to do all one possibly can, to work very hard to do something | I broke my neck to try and get the report finished on time.  |
| neck | **up to one's neck (in** **something)** | to have a lot of something, to be much involved or busy with something | I am up to my neck in work at the moment and will not be able to attend the dinner tonight.  |
| neck | **wring (someone's) neck** | to be extremely angry at someone | I want to wring my friend's neck for breaking my new laptop computer.  |
| neck | **a yoke around (someone's) neck** | - a burden for someone, something that oppresses people | The legal problems of my friend were a yoke around his neck. |
| neck | **breathe down (someone`s) neck** | to watch someone closely (often by standing right behind them), to pressure someone to do something | My boss has been breathing down my neck all day to pressure me to finish the report.  |
| neck | **a crick in one's neck** | a painful cramp in one's neck | I woke up this morning with a crick in my neck.  |
| neck | **dead from the neck up** | to be very stupid | My boss seems to be dead from the neck up.  |
| neck | **a kink in one's neck** | a cramp in one's neck that causes pain | I have a kink in my neck and it hurts when I turn my head.  |
| neck | **a millstone around (someone's) neck** | - a burden or handicap for someone | My parents' condominium is a millstone around their neck and they want to sell it |
| neck | **neck and neck** | exactly even in a race or contest | The two horses were neck and neck at the end of the race.  |
| neck | **a pain in the neck** | an annoying or bothersome person or event | Our customer is a pain in the neck and is always complaining about something.  |
| neck | **risk one's neck (to do something)** | to risk harm in order to do something | The fireman risked his neck to save the young child.  |
| neck | **save (someone`s) neck/skin** | to save someone from danger or trouble or embarrassment | The worker tried to save his own neck without thinking about other people.  |
| shoulder | To shoulder the blame | To take the blame for something |  |
| shoulder | cold shoulder | To ignore someone |  “Steve would not take to James after their argument. He has given him the cold shoulder.” |
| stomach | cannot stomach someone or something | To dislike someone or something |  |
| teeth | by the skin of one's teeth | If you manage to do something by the skin of your teeth, you succeed in doing it but you almost fail. | "The traffic was so heavy I thought I'd miss the train, but I caught it **by the skin of my teeth**."  |
| teeth | like pulling teeth | to be very difficult |  Getting Bobby to clean his room is like pulling teeth. |
| teeth | give your eye teeth for something | to offer **something** precious in order to gain **something** or be **something**. ... In historic times, **eye teeth** were considered valuable as **a** sign that **a** child had grown its full set **of** teeth. |  |
| teeth | **grit your teeth** | When you are determined to do something in spite of the difficulties involved, you grit your teeth.  | "To reach safety I had to **grit my teeth** and wade through the mud." |
| teeth | **lie through your teeth** | If you lie through your teeth, you lie openly and brazenly, knowing that what you are saying is completely false.  | "I saw him breaking the window. If he denies it, he's **lying through his teeth**." |
| teeth | **sink one's teeth into (something)** | If you sink your teeth into something, you do it with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.  | "When Julie got promoted, she immediately **sank her teeth into** her new job." |
| teeth | **teeth chattering** | If your teeth are chattering, you are extremely cold.  | "Was I cold? My **teeth were chattering**!" |
| teeth | **teething problems** | The difficulties encountered during the initial stage of an activity or project are called teething problems.  | "We had some **teething problems** when we first opened the bookshop, but now everything is okay." |
| thumb | rule of thumb | basic rule (not always followed) | The rule of thumb is that the students wear black pants and white shirts. |
| thumb | thumbs up | agreement | I came him the thumbs up to start the work |
| thumb | Thumb a ride | Hitch hike |  |
| toe | Toe the line | Follow the rules |  |
| toe | Dip your toe into somethingThe expression ‘dip a toe in the water’ means the same. | To dip your toe into something is to try doing it in order to test whether you will be able to do it. | By launching their own handset, they have dipped their toe into the lucrative smartphone market. |
| toe | From head to toe / from top to toe | If a person is covered from head to toe, the whole of their body is covered. | She was covered in black fur from head to toe. |
| toe | Keep someone on their toes | To keep someone on their toes is to keep them alert. | My little kids keep me on my toes all the time. |
| toe | Make someone’s toes curl | To make someone’s toes curl is to make them feel extremely embarrassed. | The very thought of that incident makes my toes curl. |
| toe | Tread/step on someone’s toes | To tread on someone’s toes is to offend them by doing something that they have the authority to do. | You shouldn’t have stepped on your manager’s toes by talking to the media without his consent. |
| toe | Touch your toes | To touch your toes is to bend while keeping your legs straight.  | This is a form of physical exercise. |
| tongue | on the tip of my tongue | to be almost able to remember or expressed |  His name was on the tip of my tongue, but I needed to ask him. |
| tongue | to bite your tongue | To try really hard not to say what you feel | I often have to bite my tongue when my son-in-law argues with my grand-daughter |
| tongue | Tongue lashing | When you scold someone severely, you give them a tongue-lashing*.* | "The teacher gave Jeremy a***tongue-lashing***when he arrived late for school." |
| tongue | To give someone the rough side or edge of your tongue | To speak to someone angrily or harshly about something they have done | He's really going **to give** the boy the **rough** side of **his tongue**. |
| tongue | to keep a civil tongue | To speak politely | Although she was angry, she kept a **civil tongue**. |
| tongue | Hold your tongue | Keep silent about tomething |  |
| tongue | A slip of the tongue | A slip of the tongue is a small spoken error or mistake.  | "Did I say 'blow down'? - Sorry, I meant 'slow down' - that was **a slip of the tongue**!" |
| tongue | Tongue in cheek | If you describe a remark as 'tongue in cheek*'* you mean that it is not meant to be taken seriously; it is meant to be funny or ironic.  | "Peter's remark was taken more seriously than intended. It was supposed to be***tongue in cheek***." |
| tongue | Tongue tied | If you aretongue-tied,you have difficulty in expressing yourself because you are nervous or embarrassed.  | "At the start of the interview I was completely***tongue-tied***!" |
| tongue | Tongues are wagging | When tongues are wagging, people are beginning to spread gossip or rumours, often about someone's private life.  | "The photograph of the couple that appeared in a magazine really **set tongues wagging**." |
| tongue | Get your tongue round something | If you are able to pronounce a difficult word or phrase, you can get your tongue round it.  | "She's from the village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyll. Try **getting your tongue round that**!" |
| tooth | sweet tooth | a love of sugar or sweet things | I need three spoonfuls of sugar in my tea. I have a sweet tooth. |
| tooth | To be long in the tooth | Getting on in years | My grandfather always said that he may be **long in the teeth** but he has more knowledge about the business than we do. He was very right. |
| tooth | **(have a) sweet tooth** | Someone who has a sweet tooth enjoys eating sweet things like sugar, pastries, chocolate, etc.  | "My mother will be delighted if you bring her chocolates - she's got **a sweet tooth**."  |