
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Comfort food



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Neil

I see you've been tucking into the biscuits again, Rob.

Rob

Well, I have, Neil. You can't beat a bite on a biscuit for a quick and easy sweet treat. They make me feel good – as long as I don't eat too many!

Neil

So, these are your 'edible comforters' – a **comforter** is something that makes you feel relaxed and feel good. Put another way, it is your comfort food, which is what we're talking about in this programme.

Rob

Yes, like biscuits – comfort food is snacks and meals we like to stuff our faces with, even if it's not always good for us. We'll be discussing what actually makes us eat the stuff.

Neil

But how about a question to feast on, Rob? Patrick Bertoletti from the USA holds the Guinness World Record for eating the most cream-filled biscuits in one minute, but do you know how many biscuits he ate? Was it...

- a) 2
- b) 7, or
- c) 15?

Rob

Well, based on my biscuit-eating skills, I'd say 15 – it depends if he had to swallow them all as well.

Neil

I'm not sure about that – but I'll reveal the answer later on. Now, biscuits, ice cream, crisps and pizzas are all good examples of comfort food. They're easy to snack on and they don't require many **culinary** skills – **culinary** means related to cooking.

Rob

Umm, well that makes sense, but there must be something else that is urging us to seek out this 'easy' food?

Neil

According to psychologist Shira Gabriel, it's about memories and emotional experiences. She spoke on The Food Chain podcast on BBC World Service and said her comfort food was macaroni and cheese – something that brings back memories...

Shira Gabriel, psychologist

At some point in my life those were foods that were made for me or shared with me by people who cared about me and loved me and took care of me, so because those are the foods that I had in my youth, I've **associated** with them, sort of, those feelings of being taken care of. And those associations are strong, the associations we have with food are very strong, and so by eating those foods, I'm able to activate those associations and give myself a **rush** of positive feelings and a sense of acceptance.

Neil

... so like so many of us, Shira **associates** eating certain types of food with past experiences from her youth. **Associates** means makes a connection in your mind with something.

Rob

And these connections between food and memories are very strong. I know eating biscuits reminds me of eating them after school, as a treat.

Neil

Well, Shira explains how we get a **rush** – a sudden and strong emotion – of positive feelings when these memories are activated by eating comfort food.

Rob

And it's not just memories that are activated, but also the emotions we feel as well. If we felt happy the first time we ate the food, then hopefully we'll feel happy when we eat it again.

Neil

It's not always that simple, Rob. Tucking into food that's high in carbohydrates, sugar or salt can make us feel guilty, but we don't realise our minds are trying to trigger – or start - a positive emotion, and it's making us eat that food to do so.

Rob

The Food Chain podcast explores this in more detail – but what is interesting is that comfort food isn't universal. Some languages don't have a comparable phrase.

Neil

It's a good point and something food writer Jenny Linford talked about. Here's her theory on why that is...

Jenny Linford, food writer

Talking to Italian friends, I realised that, no, they don't have a phrase for 'comfort food' – I think it's sort of **irrelevant**.... My Italian friends I asked about comfort food, they were just, they said to me, look you know, food is always comfort and always pleasure and it's a joyful thing, so it's just really interesting that you know this idea of comfort food is not universal, it's actually quite **nuanced**.

Rob

So, according to Jenny's Italian friends, all food brings comfort and pleasure. Talking about specific comforting food is **irrelevant** – it is not important or has no connection with the discussion.

Neil

Yes, she thinks the concept of comfort food is quite **nuanced**, depending on where you are from – so there are small but important differences.

Rob

Well, maybe we should **take comfort** from - or feel less bad about – the fact that eating any kind of food can bring us joy, warmth, happiness and comfort. So if you don't mind, I think I'll munch on another biscuit.

Neil

Are you trying to beat the record of Patrick Bertolotti from the USA? Earlier I

mentioned he holds the Guinness World Record for eating the most cream-filled biscuits in one minute, but how many biscuits did he eat? Was it...

- a) 2
- b) 7, or
- c) 15?

Rob

I thought he ate 15. Was I right?

Neil

No, Rob. He scoffed only 7 in one minute. So maybe you can beat him? But before you do, let's recap on some of the vocabulary we've been discussing.

Rob

Of course. We've been talking about comfort food – food that makes us feel good – and we described it as a '**comforter**' - something that makes us feel relaxed and feel good.

Neil

We also mentioned **culinary** – connected to cooking.

Rob

And **associated** – which means made a connection in our mind with something.

Neil

Something that is **irrelevant** is not important or has no connection with the discussion taking place.

Rob

And something that is **nuanced** has small but important differences.

Neil

Finally, when you **take comfort** in something, you don't feel so bad because of something else.

Rob

Well, Neil, we're out of time but let's take comfort in knowing that there are lots more 6 Minute English programmes to enjoy on our website at bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

We also have an app that you can download for free from the app stores. And of course, we are all over social media.

Rob

Thanks for listening and goodbye.

Neil

Goodbye.

VOCABULARY

comforter

something that makes us feel relaxed and feel good.

culinary

connected to cooking

associated

made a connection in our mind with something

irrelevant

not important or has no connection with the discussion taking place

nuanced

small but important differences

take comfort

don't feel so bad (because of something else)