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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The English We Speak

### Knee-jerk reaction

The logo for BBC Learning English, featuring the letters 'BBC' in a white box above the words 'LEARNING ENGLISH' in white text on a teal background.

*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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**Neil**

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, I'm Neil and joining me is Feifei...

**Feifei**

Hello.

**Neil**

I've got a medical experiment to perform on you in this programme, Feifei.

**Feifei**

Righhhht...

**Neil**

Come on – it's for our listeners. We've got an expression which means to react to something without thinking about it carefully first. So, cross one leg over the other, like that.

**Feifei**

What are you doing with that hammer?

**Neil**

Keep calm – it's OK, I'm not going to hurt you. And I'll just tap your knee... And... it worked!

**Feifei**

Yes Neil, well done. You've just tested my reflexes. When you hit my knee with the hammer, my leg kicked automatically. I didn't even think about it.

**Neil**

It was a knee-jerk reaction. And in English we can say that someone has a knee-jerk reaction when they act after an event without thinking carefully.

**Feifei**

Let's hear some examples of 'knee-jerk reaction'.

#### **Examples**

After the terrorist attack, the government should be careful to avoid a knee-jerk reaction. A declaration of war could lead to even bigger problems later.

He left his wife after he saw her having a drink with another man but it was a knee-jerk reaction. He'll be back.

Putting up interest rates because of inflation is a knee-jerk reaction. They haven't thought of the other consequences.

**Feifei**

A knee-jerk reaction. Acting automatically, without thinking about the consequences.

**Neil**

Let's try that again with the other knee. Here we go... (Smacking sfx) Argh – you kicked me in the face!

**Feifei**

Sorry Neil – it was just a knee-jerk reaction.

**Neil**

Ow...

**Both**

Bye!