



ESL Podcast 584 – Calling in Sick to Work

GLOSSARY

fed up – very frustrated with something; very tired of doing something and not wanting to do it anymore

* I'm fed up with hearing you two argue all the time! Why can't you just be friends?

to call in sick – to call one's supervisor or boss and let him or her know that one is ill, so one will stay home and not work that day

* Helena called in sick this morning, so Jack is going to go to the meeting for her.

peppered with questions – asked many questions; needing to answer many questions that are asked quickly or in a short period of time

* The spokesperson was peppered with questions from reporters at the press conference.

to come in – to go to a particular place where one is expected, especially to go to work

* I normally come into the office at 8:15, but yesterday I was late because I overslept.

to not feel well – to feel sick; to have a cold or flu; to be ill

* After eating an entire box of cookies, Joerg wasn't feeling well.

to come down with (something) – to catch a cold; to become sick

* Ever since Petra started going to daycare, she seems to come down with something every week!

to throw up – to vomit; for the contents of one's stomach to come up and exit one's mouth, usually when one is very sick or when one has had too much to eat or drink

* Ines is worried that a ride on the roller coaster will make her throw up.

food poisoning – a stomach problem where one vomits and/or has diarrhea because one has eaten something that had bacteria and/or wasn't cooked properly

* Have you ever gotten food poisoning from eating undercooked chicken?

24-hour bug – an illness that lasts only one day and is not very serious

* Yesterday, I had a runny nose and a cough, but today, I feel much better so I guess it was just a 24-hour bug.



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to take a day off from work – to not come into work one day, usually because one is sick or has something else to do

* Each December, Ingot takes a day off from work to shop for Christmas presents and bake Christmas cookies.

death in the family – when one's relative passes away; when someone in one's family dies

* Randy isn't in the office today because there was a death in the family. He should be back tomorrow.

funeral – the ceremony that happens after someone dies and before the body is buried, usually to share memories of the dead person and to say goodbye

* Is it important to wear black clothing to a funeral?

in a row – consecutive; one after another, without any breaks or gaps

* We've had 40 sunny days in a row. What a fantastic spring!

miraculous recovery – a very fast, surprising, and unexpected return to health after one has been sick or injured, often used sarcastically when one does not really believe that someone has been sick or injured

* Jimmy was complaining that his stomach hurt and he wouldn't be able to go to school, but when his father reminded him that it was a Saturday, he had a miraculous recovery and ran outside to play.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Peter mean when he says, “I think I’ve come down with something”?
 - a) He feels depressed.
 - b) He’s getting sick.
 - c) He didn’t finish his work.
2. According to Peter, why didn’t he come into work two weeks ago?
 - a) Because someone tried to poison him.
 - b) Because he was learning how to cook poison.
 - c) Because he ate something that made him sick.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to come down with (something)

The phrase “to come down with (something),” in this podcast, means to catch a cold or to become sick: “You’ll come down with something if you don’t wash your hands before you eat.” The phrase “to come up with (something)” means to have an idea or answer, and especially to find a solution for a problem: “I’m sure we can come up with a solution if we work together.” The phrase “to come up with (something)” also means to find enough money to buy or do something: “How are we going to come up with the \$2,000 we need to fix the car?” The phrase “to be coming up” means to happen soon: “Isn’t your birthday coming up next month?” Finally, the phrase “to come to a decision” means to agree on what should be done next: “They’ve been arguing for hours and still haven’t come to a decision.”

row

In this podcast, the phrase “in a row” means consecutive or one after another, without any breaks or gaps: “We’ve spent the last seven Thanksgivings in a row with your parents. This year, let’s spend Thanksgiving with my parents.”

Normally a “row” is a group of things that are in a line next to each other: “The suburbs are full of boring rows of identical houses.” A “row” is also a group of seats placed next to each other in a theater: “It hurts my neck to watch a movie while sitting in the front row at the theater.” As a verb, “to row” means to make a boat move over the water by using oars (long pieces of wood with a flat end in the water): “Valery’s arms were really tired after rowing the canoe for hours.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many American workers are “entitled to” (allowed to have) sick “leave” (absence from work for a short period of time), also known as medical leave, thanks to the “Accrued” (accumulating or building up over time) Sick and Safe Leave “Act” (law), which was “enacted” (made into law) in 2008. Most workers can “earn” (receive in exchange for working) between three and seven days of paid sick leave per year, depending on how large a company or organization they work for.

Sick leave is primarily “intended” (meant for) to be used when one is sick and needs time to “recover” (get better). Sick leave is also intended to protect other employees from their “contagious” (able to share a disease with other people) co-workers. However, employees can use sick leave for several other purposes.

American workers can “request” (ask for) sick leave when they need to “care for” (take care of) sick family members. For example, if a worker’s child is too sick to go to school, he or she may need to stay at home with the child that day. Sick leave can also be used when one needs time away from work to go to a doctor’s office or receive medical “treatment” (care).

Some companies are very “laidback” (relaxed) and “grant” (allow; give) medical leave for their employees without asking for an explanation. They might even allow employees to take medical leave when they feel “stressed out” (very anxious and worried) and need time “away from the office” (not at work). Other companies are “stricter” (having more rules to follow) and require their employees to “present” (show) a “note” (written letter) from their doctor stating that they were too sick to go to work on a particular day or for a particular period of time.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 584: Calling in Sick to Work.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 584. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to our website at eslpod.com to download a Learning Guide for this episode, it will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Calling in Sick to Work." It's a dialogue between Peter and Magda about what happens when someone decides they are too sick to go to work. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

I was fed up with work and wanted the day off. I decided to call in sick. I wasn't prepared, though, to be peppered with questions.

Peter: Hello, this is Peter. Is this Magda?

Magda: Yes. This is Magda.

Peter: Hi, Magda. I won't be coming in today. I'm not feeling well. I think I've come down with something.

Magda: Hmm, what seems to be the problem?

Peter: The problem? Oh...I've been up all night throwing up and I feel terrible.

Magda: Didn't you have something like this two weeks ago when you called in sick?

Peter: Two weeks ago? No, I had food poisoning two weeks ago.

Magda: And what about a month ago when you called in sick?

Peter: That was a 24-hour bug.



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Magda: Didn't you just take a day off from work because of a death in the family?

Peter: Yes, I had to go to the funeral.

Magda: I see. That's one day off from work a week, four weeks in a row. [long silence]

Peter: Uh, I'll be in within the hour.

Magda: I'm glad you've had a miraculous recovery.

[end of dialogue]

Peter begins our dialogue by saying that he was fed (fed) up with work and wanted the day off. "To be fed up" means to be very frustrated with something, to be very tired of doing something. "I am fed up with this TV show, I don't want to watch it anymore." I'm tired of it; I don't want to see it again. It's used to express extreme frustration – very frustrated. Well, Peter wants to have the day off, meaning he doesn't want to work today – who does? So, he says he decides to call in sick. "To call in sick" means to call your boss – your supervisor – and let him or her know that you are ill, you're sick. Oh, you can't go into work because you don't feel well. It always helps to sound very sick when you call in sick. Peter says, "I wasn't prepared, though, to be peppered with questions." "To be peppered (peppered) with questions" means to be asked many, many questions, usually in a very short period of time – one question, then another question, then another question.

Peter calls up and he says, "Hello, this is Peter. Is this Magda?" and Magda says, "Yes. This is Magda." Peter says, "Hi, Magda. I won't be coming in today." "To come in" means to go to a particular place where they are expecting you, usually work. "Is John coming in today?" meaning is he going to be here to work – is he coming to the office? Peter says he won't be coming in today, "I'm not feeling well," he says. When someone says they "don't feel well" they mean they're sick. Perhaps they have a cold; perhaps they have a flu or some other illness. He says, "I think I've come down with something." "To come down with something" is a phrasal verb that usually means to catch a cold. You start sneezing, your head hurts; maybe you are running a temperature, meaning that the heat of your body is too high. It can generally mean, however, to become sick, but usually sick with either a cold or a flu, not too serious. There's actually a



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couple meaning of this verb, “to come.” Take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

So, Peter is coming down with something; it’s a nice thing to say if you don’t want to be too specific about what your illness is. Magda says, “Hmm, what seems to be the problem?” What is wrong with you specifically? Peter says, “The problem?” Of course, he’s not prepared to answer medical questions from his boss. He says, “Oh...I’ve been up all night throwing up and I feel terrible.” “To be up all night” means to be awake all night. What has he been awake doing? He’s been awake throwing up. “To throw up” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to vomit (vomit), where the contents of your stomach come out and go out your mouth. I think you understand what I’m saying – not a very pleasant thing!

Peter says he feels terrible; he feels very, very sick. Magda says, “Didn’t you have something like this two weeks ago when you called in sick?” She’s reminding Peter that he was sick only two weeks ago with a similar illness. Obviously, she doesn’t believe Peter. Peter says, “Two weeks ago? No, I had food poisoning two weeks ago.” So, Peter is saying that he had a different illness two weeks ago; he had food poisoning. “Food poisoning” is when you eat some food that is bad that makes you sick; that’s food poisoning.

Magda says, “And what about a month ago when you called in sick?” Four weeks ago Peter was also sick. Peter says, “That was a 24-hour bug” (bug). A “24-hour bug” is an illness that is not very serious that usually only lasts for a day or so. Again, we’re typically referring to a cold or a flu; flu is probably more likely. A flu bug usually means that your stomach is upset, you have a headache, and so forth.

Magda says, “Didn’t you just take a day off from work because of a death in the family?” Magda’s asking Peter if he took a day off from work – meaning a day he did not go into work, usually because you are sick or you have some other important appointment – because of a death in the family. “A death in the family,” as you probably can guess, means when someone close to you in your family dies: your uncle, your aunt, your grandmother. There’s sort of a weird joke in schools if you’re a teacher or a student, the student who doesn’t want to go to school will say that they went to their grandmother’s funeral, and sometimes they use this excuse more than twice. So it’s sometimes not the best one to use, especially if your grandmothers have already died two or three times!

Peter says, “Yes, I had to go to the funeral.” “The funeral” (funeral) is a ceremony – an event that happens when someone dies before their body is put



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into the ground. Peter is saying that he had to go to this funeral. Magda says, “I see (I understand). That’s one day off from work a week, four times in a row.” “In a row” (row) means one after the other, consecutively, without any breaks or gaps. If the Boston Red Sox win the World Series in baseball – the big championship – this year, next year, and the year after that, we would say they won three years in a row. I hope they don’t, but in case they do, that’s what we would say. “Row” has a couple of different meanings in English however; you know where to find those, in our Learning Guide.

Well, Magda obviously isn’t very happy with Peter. He knows that she doesn’t believe him, so Peter says, “Uh, I will be in within the hour,” meaning in less than an hour. Magda jokes with him somewhat, and says, “I’m glad you’ve had a miraculous recovery.” “Recovery” is when you get better from something; “miraculous” is something that is a miracle, something that is impossible physically. Of course, Magda is joking here about the miraculous recovery that Peter had.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

I was fed up with work and wanted the day off. I decided to call in sick. I wasn’t prepared, though, to be peppered with questions.

Peter: Hello, this is Peter. Is this Magda?

Magda: Yes. This is Magda.

Peter: Hi, Magda. I won’t be coming in today. I’m not feeling well. I think I’ve come down with something.

Magda: Hmm, what seems to be the problem?

Peter: The problem? Oh...I’ve been up all night throwing up and I feel terrible.

Magda: Didn’t you have something like this two weeks ago when you called in sick?

Peter: Two weeks ago? No, I had food poisoning two weeks ago.

Magda: And what about a month ago when you called in sick?



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Peter: That was a 24-hour bug.

Magda: Didn't you just take a day off from work because of a death in the family?

Peter: Yes, I had to go to the funeral.

Magda: I see. That's one day off from work a week, four weeks in a row. [long silence]

Peter: Uh, I'll be in within the hour.

Magda: I'm glad you've had a miraculous recovery.

[end of dialogue]

Good thing our scriptwriter didn't call in sick today! That would be the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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