

Chatterbox #184 – Old wives' tales

Episode description

Have you ever thought something was true, but later found out it was false? Discover more false facts with Andrew and Suzanne as they discuss old wives' tales—common advice and traditional beliefs that are unscientific or untrue.

Fun fact

Although old wives' tales are almost always false, some have turned out to be true! For example, one very common old wives' tale is that eating carrots can improve your eyesight. Carrots are actually rich in beta-carotene, which your body turns into vitamin A, a vital nutrient that helps keep your eyes healthy and prevents cataracts!

Expressions included in the learning materials

- To get [something] off your chest
- To vent
- An old wives' tale
- A superstition
- To write [something] off



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hello everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And we're back with another Culips episode.

Suzanne: Yay!

Andrew: Suzanne, what's up?

Suzanne: Nothing much, Andrew. How about you? Anything new?

Andrew: I had something annoying happen to me today that I'd like **to get off my chest**, if you're willing to listen to me.

Suzanne: I am here when you need **to vent**, always.

Andrew: This is a very minor thing. It's just an annoying thing that happened to me today. Because I was on my phone ...

Suzanne: Mmhmm.

Andrew: Last week or several days ago, I can't quite remember. And my Wi-Fi was going really slow. So I just turned my Wi-Fi off to use my mobile data.

Suzanne: OK.

Andrew: But I forgot to turn ...

Suzanne: Oh.

Andrew: Mobile off until today. Maybe 5 or 6 days later, I realized I was still using my mobile data, which means I've been using my data for this whole time. And I just have a very small data package. So I think I'm going to have a high cell phone bill. Ah!

Suzanne: Oh, man! That's terrible and that's super annoying.

Andrew: It's very annoying.

- Suzanne: And they don't send you alerts because here, in Canada, they'll say, "Hey, you've used 95% of your Wi-Fi allotted for the month."
- Andrew: Yeah. I think, because I'm at the start of a new billing cycle, I thankfully haven't gone over. I'm just going to have to be very careful for the rest of the month to not use my data.
- Suzanne: Now in the US, I think they have unlimited data.
- Andrew: Unlimited plans.
- Suzanne: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: I have 1 gigabyte of data.
- Suzanne: Yeah, yeah. It's ...
- Andrew: So I'm probably close.
- Suzanne: Yeah. I only have 2 gigabytes, which I thought was, like, "OK, that's something." And then I'm like, "Wow! That goes really fast." Yeah.
- Andrew: No more listening to Culips on the bus for me. I'm going to have to download it first.
- Suzanne: You have to download it first. Yes, that's it. Download those podcasts.
- Andrew: No more streaming. There we go. We're going to take a quick break, and then we'll be right back to get started with today's episode.
- Announcer: The best way to study with Culips is by becoming a Culips member. When you become a Culips member, you will get full transcripts, detailed vocabulary explanations, and quizzes for each episode. Visit Culips.com—that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com—to sign up and become a member.
- Andrew: I think we have a really interesting and funny episode lined up.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: And so we're going to do a Chatterbox episode. This is where we have a totally natural conversation. And yeah, Suzanne, what is the topic of today's Chatterbox episode?
- Suzanne: Today's topic is all about **old wives' tales, old wives' tales**.
- Andrew: **Old wives' tales**.
- Suzanne: Do you know what **an old wives' tale** is, Andrew?

- Andrew: Yes, I do. And I will try my best to explain it to everyone. So **an old wives' tale** is an old idea or an old belief that most people think is true, but it's actually not been proven scientifically. So it's not been tested. There's been no experiments to prove that it's true. We just believe it to be true. It's almost like **a superstition**.
- Suzanne: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: And another word we could use to describe it is folklore. So it's kind of this very old tradition that people living a long time ago believed to be true. But you know, really when we take a look at the claim, when we look at what **an old wives' tale** is, we say, "Ah, that's not true. Come on. Get outta here."
- Suzanne: Yeah. And they're called **old wives' tales**. So wives being women who are married and sometimes have children, and they've been traditionally associated with concerns of women—so health, nutrition, raising children, or childbirth. They have originated from things that women in the past have traditionally done, and those beliefs get passed down through stories from generation to generation. And sometimes they end up becoming these crazy tales, and that's why most of them aren't true. They've just been passed down and passed down, and maybe changed and morphed into a totally different meaning than what they originally were meant to be.
- Andrew: Absolutely. And we should clarify that tales is spelled T-A-L-E-S, tales. So like a fairy tale.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Kind of a story, right? Something that's not true is a tale. And like you said, **old wives' tales** are traditionally things that concerned women, like raising children. And there's a lot of **old wives' tales** about pregnancy and ...
- Suzanne: Oh yeah.
- Andrew: What gender your baby will be.
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: I'm not an expert on this subject, but I know there are a lot.
- Suzanne: Yes, a lot of times they think if the belly of the woman is higher, like has a higher bump ...
- Andrew: Yes.
- Suzanne: Then it's a boy.
- Andrew: Right.

- Suzanne: But I really don't know if that's true, honestly.
- Andrew: There are hundreds, literally hundreds of pregnancy **old wives' tales**.
- Suzanne: Oh my God.
- Andrew: And if you are interested—maybe you're a pregnant woman listening to this episode—you can Google pregnancy ...
- Suzanne: Google.
- Andrew: **Old wives' tales**, and maybe you will find out if you're carrying a boy or a girl. Who knows?
- Suzanne: Oh my gosh. I'd be interested in hearing those funny tales. And isn't it true that most of the time, when your friends or someone tells you **an old wives' tale**, like, "I heard that if the belly is higher, blah, blah, blah," and they always finish with like, "Yeah, but who knows? Some **old wives' tale**," right?
- Andrew: Yeah, you **write it off**.
- Suzanne: A lot of times people will excuse it or **write it off** with like, "Yeah, but who knows? I don't know. It's something I heard a long time ago."
- Andrew: Well, this is the example of the oral storytelling tradition, right? One generation telling the **old wives' tale** to the next generation to the next generation. And that's why people often introduce these **old wives' tales** by saying, "Oh, I heard that."
- Suzanne: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: You know, they have no source.
- Suzanne: Yeah,
- Andrew: It's not like I read in the newspaper. I saw it on TV. I heard it.
- Suzanne: I heard it. You know how a lot of people will say, "You know, they say," they ...
- Andrew: They ... Yeah, who is they?
- Suzanne: Who's they? Like maybe those are the old wives that made up these crazy stories that pass down from generations. I always wondered, and I think the they in those situations, are used in accordance with these kinds of little lines and little beliefs, right?

- Andrew: This is another strategy people use when they don't know the source of the information.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Right? They use say "they," like some people, somewhere, have said this. I don't know who, but they said it.
- Suzanne: And they seem to know a lot.
- Andrew: Yeah, they are very smart. So now that we've defined what **an old wives' tale** is ...
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: In part 2 of this episode, we're going to share some **old wives' tales** with you and then evaluate them. Judge if we think that there is some ancient wisdom here—and this is a good thing—or if it's total garbage and we can just laugh at the silliness of the **old wives' tale**.
- This is a very common **old wives' tale**, one that my mother used to tell me in fact.
- Suzanne: What did she say?
- Andrew: And that is, "Swimming with a full stomach will give you a cramp. So you should wait at least an hour after eating before you go swimming."
- Suzanne: Ah. I listened to a podcast called *The Gist*. I think I've told you this.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Suzanne: And this was one of the questions that they covered. And they said that no, it's wrong. It doesn't cause you cramps. You don't have to wait.
- Andrew: It doesn't cause you cramps?
- Suzanne: No.
- Andrew: You don't have to wait. So this is another **old wives' tale** with no truth to it. You can go swimming any time.
- Suzanne: The survey says, "Not true."
- Andrew: I have never believed in this **old wives' tale**, but I have always followed it. What about you, Suzanne? If you're at the beach and you have a little picnic ...

- Suzanne: Totally.
- Andrew: And then you want to go swimming, do you wait or do you go right away? What's your protocol?
- Suzanne: I don't know at the beach, but we used to belong to, like, a community pool by my house, growing up. And so we would bring our lunch and sit at the picnic tables, and then jump into the pool. And my mom would always say, "Wait! Wait!" And she actually made us wait an hour.
- Andrew: And hour, yeah.
- Suzanne: An hour. And we would be in the hot sun in Texas, and we would be so hot for an hour. Like, "Mom, come on!" And it was so annoying. And I believed her, but I was so mad because all I wanted to do was jump in the pool.
- Andrew: That's really funny.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Are there any **old wives' tales** that you find particularly interesting?
- Suzanne: There is. I actually didn't know it was **an old wives' tale**. I thought it was really still true. Shaving hair makes the hair grow back thicker. I really thought it was true. It's not true.
- Andrew: It's not true, and I know this from experience because when I was 20, 21 years old, I always wanted to have a beard.
- Suzanne: OK.
- Andrew: But my beard was pretty weak when I was 20 years old—maybe even younger, maybe 18, 19 years old—so I would shave every day ...
- Suzanne: Wow.
- Andrew: To hope that my beard would get thicker. And nope. I mean it did over time. I can grow a beard now, but I don't think it was due to shaving. It was just due to me growing up.
- Suzanne: OK, and maybe growing more hair because you were getting older. And that's how it works.
- Andrew: Exactly. I think so, yeah.
- Suzanne: Yeah, because my mom, when I was in ... Again, it was ... It's always a mom talking to their kids.

Andrew: Yeah.

Suzanne: When I was in fifth grade—sixth grade! Excuse me, sixth grade, I moved to Texas, and we started to have gym class in shorts because it's hotter in Texas than in New York City, where we would wear sweatpants. And the shorts revealed your leg hair.

Andrew: Sure.

Suzanne: And I was 12, so I hadn't started shaving my legs yet. I was pretty young.

Andrew: Totally.

Suzanne: So I shaved only one leg because I knew that if I did one leg, she couldn't get mad. I'd have to do the other one. And she was like, "Why did you do that?" She got really upset.

Andrew: Right.

Suzanne: I was like, "Well, all the other girls are doing it." And she said, "Don't you know that it's going to grow back thicker?" I'm like, "No!" So yeah.

Andrew: Ah. I mean if this one was true, Suzanne, I would be shaving my head right now to grow back a thicker and fuller head of hair,

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: But yeah, unfortunately it just doesn't work.

Suzanne: It doesn't work, nope. So **an old wives' tale**, that just up until recently I believed was true, is the one that says that you need 8 hours of sleep in order to be rested, that you have to get 8 hours of sleep a night.

Andrew: OK. I'm skeptical about this, Suzanne. And why is it not true? Convince me.

Suzanne: Because it actually depends on two things. Depends on the person, so their age.

Andrew: Yup.

Suzanne: Right? Like the person ... Some people don't need as much sleep as 8 hours. They just don't. And it actually matters more about consistency. So if you get 5 hours every day, you're healthier than someone who gets 8 and then 6 and then 10 and then 7.

Andrew: You know what? I do believe this, actually. I was playing devil's advocate, but I'm with you. Because most days I only get ...

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Six hours of sleep, and it's OK. I'm not very tired.

Suzanne: It's good to be consistent more than it is to get a certain amount that you think you should get.

Andrew: Yeah, it's all about following the sleep cycles.

Suzanne: Circadian rhythms.

Andrew: It's funny that all of these **old wives' tales** that we've looked today are all false. Science has said, "Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong."

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: So don't blindly believe **an old wives' tale**. You have to critically look at it whenever somebody tells you something. "Well, you know, they say"—your warning flags should be raised.

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: Something weird is happening, yeah.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: I think that will bring us to the end of today's episode.

Suzanne: Yeah! And thank you, guys, so much for spending your time listening to us. Our website is Culips.com. And remember, if you want to learn more about how you can study with us and improve your English, visit Culips.com.

Andrew: Yeah. And we love it when we hear from you. So if you have comments or a question or a suggestion for an episode topic, please reach out to us. You can contact us through our Facebook page, facebook.com/culipspodcast, C-U-L-I-P-S-P-O-D-C-A-S-T. Or you can email us directly at contact@culips.com.

We will be back soon with another episode for you, so stay tuned and we'll talk to you next time. Bye.

Suzanne: Bye!

Announcer: Do you like listening to Culips? If so, please show your support by leaving Culips a five-star rating and a review on iTunes or Stitcher. This helps new listeners find the show. So don't delay. Rate and review today.

Detailed Explanations

To get [something] off your chest

Talking about something that you have been worried about for a while can be good and help you to feel less anxious and worried. This action of talking about something that has been bothering you so that you feel better is called **getting [something] off your chest**.

This expression is easy to understand if you picture it. Imagine that you're lying down and the thing you're worried about is an object on your chest. If you remove the object that is weighing you down, you will feel relief. So when you **get [something] off your chest**, or share what you're worried about with another person, you experience a similar feeling of relief.

For example, in this episode, Andrew asks Suzanne if he can **get [something] off his chest**. In other words, he's asking permission to talk about something that's been bothering him. In this case, Andrew shares something that has been frustrating him—that he used up almost all his mobile data for the month—so he could stop being annoyed by it.

Here are a couple more examples with **to get [something] off your chest**:

Jarod:	Hey Hannah! How's it going?
Hannah:	Fine, I guess.
Jarod:	For some reason, I don't believe you. Is something bothering you?
Hannah:	You're right. There is something bothering me, but I don't want to talk about it. I don't think talking would make me feel any better.
Jarod:	OK, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I'm here if you change your mind and want to get it off your chest another time.

Luke:	Welcome home! How was your day?
Megan:	Awful! I've had such a frustrating day! I missed my bus this morning, got yelled at by my boss, and forgot my lunch! Sorry, I should stop complaining.
Luke:	Don't worry about it! It's good to get things off your chest .

To vent

To vent means to strongly express negative emotions. It is similar to **to get [something] off your chest**, but is more forceful. While you can **vent** any negative emotion, anger and frustration are the main emotions associated with **venting**.

To vent is related to the noun a vent. A vent is a small opening designed to allow gas, smoke, or air to be released. We call expressing your negative emotions **venting** because it's like opening a vent to allow negative emotions to get out.

You can use **to vent** to talk about your feelings with another person. In this episode, Suzanne responds to Andrew's request **to get something off his chest** by saying that she's here if he wants **to vent** to her. In other words, she's happy to listen to him express his frustration.

You can also **vent** your emotions by directing that emotion at a person or a thing. For example, have you ever been so angry that you kicked something? That would be called **venting** on that thing. Similarly, if you expressed your anger by being angry with someone you **vented** at them.

Here are a couple more examples with **to vent**:

Laura:	I'm so angry right now!
Brent:	Why? What's going on?
Laura:	My boyfriend and I just had a big fight. I'm really frustrated and upset right now.
Brent:	I'm happy to listen if you want to tell me about it. You might feel better if you vent .

Ashley:	I'm so glad to be home. It was a weird day at work.
Kyle:	How come?
Ashely:	My boss was in a really bad mood. She kept telling me to redo my work, and she wasn't being nice about it. She's going through a hard time with her family right now, so her behaviour is understandable.
Kyle:	Even if her personal life isn't going well, she shouldn't be venting her emotions on her employees. That's bad management!

An old wives' tale

Old wives' tales are stories, **superstitions**, or beliefs that many people think are true, but that are unscientific or false. Most **old wives' tales** are related to health and the body, or things that traditionally concerned women.

In conversation, if someone refers to something as **an old wives' tale**, they are dismissing it and saying that it is untrue.

Here are a few more examples of **old wives' tales**:

- Cracking your knuckles causes arthritis.
- Chocolate gives you pimples.
- The proper way to treat a cut is to let it dry.
- If you swallow gum, it will stay in your stomach for 7 years.
- If you go outside with wet hair, you'll catch a cold.
- Eating sugar makes children hyper.
- Drinking coffee stunts your growth.
- We only use 10% of our brains.
- Eating late at night causes weight gain.

While many **old wives' tales** are obviously false, there are some that many people still believe.

Here's one more example with **an old wives' tale**:

TJ:	What do you want to do with the rest of the afternoon? I'm getting a little restless. It would be nice to do something active.
Shannon:	Yeah, I agree. Do you want to go swimming? There's a nice outdoor pool that's just a 5-minute walk from here.
TJ:	But we just ate! Everyone knows you shouldn't go swimming right after eating, and you have to wait at least half an hour. I don't want to get a cramp!
Shannon:	What? I'm surprised you believe that. It's just an old wives' tale .

A superstition

Similar to **old wives' tales**, **superstitions** are traditional beliefs that are not based on science or reason. However, instead of relating to health, **superstitions** are often based on ideas of what will bring good or bad luck. Different cultures have different **superstitions**. Here are some things in Canada that are considered bad luck:

- crossing the path of a black cat
- breaking a mirror
- walking under a ladder
- opening an umbrella indoors

It's not all about bad luck! Here are some things in Canada that are considered good luck:

- finding a four-leaf clover
- having a ladybug land on you
- carrying a rabbit's foot
- finding a penny

There are also many **superstitions** that don't have to do with luck. For example, some people believe that dropping a spoon on the floor means a woman will come to visit, while dropping a knife or a fork means that a man will come to visit. This belief is **a superstition**.

Here are a couple more examples with **a superstition**:

Jessica:	Oh no! I dropped my mirror and it broke!
Steven:	Well, that's 7 years of bad luck for you.
Jessica:	Don't be silly! That's just an old superstition .

Marie:	Wow, it's really raining hard out there. Is there somewhere I can leave my open umbrella to dry out?
Nate:	Would you mind leaving it on the porch? I know it's just a superstition , but I get really nervous when someone opens an umbrella inside.
Marie:	Sure thing. My grandma makes me do the same thing.

To write [something] off

To write [something] off is a phrasal verb construction with two related meanings. First, **to write [something] off** means to cancel a debt. For example, if someone owes you money, and you decide that they don't have to pay you back, you could say, "I'm **writing the debt off**."

Second, **to write [something] off** means to accept and to recognize that something is a failure, has no value, or is lost. For example, in this episode, Andrew says that when you call an idea **an old wives' tale** you **write it off**. In other words, you recognize that it's untrue and has no value.

You can also use **to write [something] off** to express that you're giving up on something. For example, imagine that you are learning to play the guitar and decide to stop. If someone asks how learning guitar is going, you could say, "I **wrote it off**." So you can use **to write [something] off** to indicate that you have given up on an activity.

Here are a couple more examples with **to write [something] off**:

Summer:	Thanks for coming to lunch with me. Let me pay for your meal.
Rick:	That's kind, but you don't need to do that.
Summer:	Actually, I'm not just being nice. I borrowed \$20 from you a couple weeks ago. I'm just paying you back. Unless, do you wanna write it off ?
Rick:	Oh yeah, I remember. You can definitely pay for lunch now. Thanks for being honest and paying me back!

Jerry:	Ugh, I can't believe how long it's taking me to read this novel. I'm not even interested in it anymore.
Beth:	Then why are you still reading it?
Jerry:	I've put so much time into reading it that I feel like it would be a waste if I didn't finish.
Beth:	It sounds like it would be a bigger waste of time if you finished it! Just write the book off . You shouldn't spend time reading something that you don't enjoy.
Jerry:	You're right. I should accept that it's just not that good and stop.

Quiz

1. True or false: All traditional true beliefs and advice are called old wives' tales.

- a) true
- b) false

2. Which of the following is the best example of venting?

- a) eating a cookie
- b) reading a book
- c) kicking a garbage can
- d) becoming distracted

3. If you accept that something is a failure or has no value, you are _____.

- a) writing it off
- b) venting it down
- c) turning it out
- d) putting it on

4. One common type of superstition is that certain actions will bring good or bad _____.

- a) ideas
- b) luck
- c) health
- d) weather

5. To vent is to _____ express a negative emotion.

- a) cautiously
- b) nearly
- c) strongly
- d) passively

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.c 3.a 4.b 5.c

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Suzanne Cerreta
Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates
Audio editor: Andrew Bates
Transcription: Transcript Heroes Transcription Services
Learning materials writer: Morag St. Clair
English editor: Stephanie Minelga
Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima
Project manager: Jessica Cox
Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free