

Chatterbox #334 – Getting in touch: How we feel the world

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Episode description

In this episode of Chatterbox, Andrew and Anna talk about textures—the way things feel when we touch them. They share funny and personal stories about their favorite and least favorite textures, from soft cashmere to slimy foods and scratchy sweaters. They also discuss how touch is important in human relationships and how it's different in cultures around the world. You'll learn useful English expressions and vocabulary to talk about touch, feelings, and personal preferences.

Fun fact

The first video game controller that could “vibrate” or give touch feedback was Nintendo’s Rumble Pak, released in 1997. This small change made video games feel more real!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Once you go ... you can't go back / there's no going back
- To make someone gag
- To put someone over the edge
- Touchy-feely
- To take something for granted
- To have give



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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Chatterbox Episode 334. Getting in touch: how we feel the world. Featuring Andrew and Anna.

What's your favorite texture to touch? Do you have a favorite kind of material or texture that feels good if you touch it?

Anna: Well, I have to say that I'm definitely a cashmere girly through and through. So, I love a good cashmere scarf, that softness on the skin. So, I do like soft textures, I would say, in general, right? I think most people would. Fluffy things, but not too fluffy. But you know, sometimes when you stroke a dog and they have that really fluffy, soft fur, and it's just so nice, or a cat, for example, and they have this short fur and it's just so soft. So, for me, anything soft is lovely, and I just love anything that's cashmere or silk, which is really smooth, anything like that. Those are my favorite textures. Not really very surprising, I imagine. I think they're probably in the top 10 for a lot of people. What about you, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, I'm going to have to echo what you said, Anna. I think just really soft textures like that, cashmere, or a really soft wool. My wife actually just got a cashmere scarf. And when she showed it to me, you know, I'm not really like an expensive clothes kind of guy, expensive material kind of guy. I don't really seek those out too much. But yeah, she got this really nice scarf, and she showed it to me, and I put it on. And it didn't look very good because it was a woman's scarf, but it felt amazing. And I was like, oh my gosh, OK, this is what the big deal is about cashmere. Like, this is just luxurious. It was a very, very nice feeling to put it on. So yeah, Anna, I don't really have an original answer for you here. I'm going to just back up what you said and say a nice soft material like cashmere or a really nice wool. Amazing. One of my favorites.

Anna: Definitely. I'm wearing cashmere right now. I mean, **once you go cashmere, that's it. You can't go back.** There's no comparison. It's warm. It's fluffy. It's soft. So maybe we should start with the opposite, Andrew, which would be I think this is easy to talk more passionately about. Are there any textures or sensations that you absolutely hate touching?

Andrew: Yeah. Interestingly enough, you know, we're talking about cashmere, this really high-quality natural fiber. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a kind of artificial microfiber. Do you know like that kind of, I don't exactly know what it's called, but it's that kind of micro fleece material that often like throw blankets are made out of. That kind of material actually gives me the creeps. Like if I feel it, it almost sends a shiver up my spine. Like I really don't like that artificial micro fleece material. And I know many people say it's warm and I'm sure it's cheap. So, it's like affordable. But for me, I just can't stand it. If I do have to use a blanket like that in any kind of situation, it can't touch my skin. It has to be like touching, you know, my clothes and then I can get under one of those blankets, but I hate it when it touches my skin. How about you? Do you have something like that?

Anna: I have a strong aversion to any type of rough cardboard.

Andrew: Oh, interesting. OK.

Anna: So, for example, if you get like a package or a delivery and it's cardboard and it's very rough and stiff and it's kind of like hairy. I don't know how to describe it, but it's like rough on the outside. And exactly as you said there, it sends a shiver down my spine. Like I literally can't touch it. I can't stand it. And then the worst thing is if you get one of these sort of, I call them hairy cardboard boxes. Maybe guys, you know what I mean, or maybe you think I'm crazy. But also, then the worst thing is if inside it has this polystyrene blocks, these white blocks. And if you break those up, not only the texture, but the sound, it goes straight through me. Like I can't deal with it. I just, I can't deal with it.

Andrew: You mean like those little Styrofoam pieces that look like popcorn almost?

Anna: Exactly! And just the sound and the texture of them is just awful. Like I don't know who created them. They're just awful.

Andrew: You must have a difficult time with online shopping then because you're getting many cardboard boxes and a lot of those packing peanuts, I think is what we call them in Canada. I don't know if you guys call them that in the UK, but we call them "packing peanuts."

Anna: I've never heard of that. No. Well, sometimes I actually don't, I don't do it. So sometimes if there's a horrible box, which is like really difficult to put in a flat pack, I just kind of leave it for ages and I just take it out as it is. Cause I'm like, I can't bear to make it flat because I have to touch it. And then the cardboard, the sound that it makes cardboard on cardboard. Oh no. So, I would say that. And I'm also very picky about anything touching my teeth. Like that can make me feel horrible. So, if there's like a nasty texture on my teeth, like, I can't stand it.

Andrew: A lot of people have very sensitive teeth as well. I get sensitive to sometimes hot or cold on my teeth, but I'm not so sensitive about something touching it. But I, I hate the feeling of getting something stuck in your teeth. You know, after you eat corn on the cob or something and you get a little piece of corn, I hate that feeling. So, I kind of know what you're talking about there.

Anna: I remember now something's coming back to me, a childhood trauma of, I remember my mum used to wear this really scratchy wool jumper. And I remember I would have cuddles with her, and I was like, I hate that jumper. It was just horrible. It was scratchy. You felt like you were going to get some kind of cut on your skin. I was like, how can you wear this jumper? It's so scratchy. So, I remember that texture, wool, but not when it's soft, when it's that horrible sort of scratchy texture. Oh, that's horrible. That was a childhood trauma that I carry with me to this day, unfortunately.

Andrew: Yeah, I was at a vintage store recently and there was this beautiful sweater. And I was like, oh, this would be a great sweater to buy. But it was one of those sweaters that just looks amazing, but is very, very scratchy, and itchy. And if you were to put it on, it would be really uncomfortable. So, I had to pass. You know, it wasn't a cashmere sweater. I don't know exactly the quality of the wool. It looked amazing. I'm sure it was very warm, but I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't put that kind of rough texture up against my skin. So yeah, I don't know. Some people can do it. I'm not one of those people.

Anna: No, absolutely not. Definitely not. And Andrew, what about any foods? Because this is another area where people talk a lot about textures. Are you picky about any of the textures with the food that you eat?

Andrew: You know, I have to say not so much anymore, I think. These days, I'm the opposite of a picky eater. I'm like a vacuum cleaner. I'll eat everything. I'll suck up everything on the table. I don't really think there are too many textures that would, yeah, turn me off of a food. Interestingly, and I think I've mentioned this on Culips before, my brother, I'm not so sure about these days, I think maybe he's OK these days, but up until very recently, like maybe within the last few years, he could never eat mashed potatoes. There was something about the texture of mashed potatoes that he just couldn't handle. It **would make him gag** almost just even thinking about eating mashed potatoes. Loved potatoes. You know, if they were fried potatoes or roasted potatoes, no problem. But mashed, something about that **put him over the edge**.

Anna: Wow.

Andrew: So, yeah, there's some interesting food texture issues that people have out there. Absolutely. How about you, Anna? Do you have anything that you don't like the feel or the texture of too much in terms of food?

Anna: Anything slimy I'm not overly keen on. Anything that has a sort of slimy texture. For example, I remember me and my friend once we went to a restaurant, and it was, I think it

was an Indian restaurant actually, and they had this really interesting food. But one of the plates that they gave us were these balls, and they were like balls with a hard shell. And we weren't really sure what to expect. They didn't tell us. And anyway, what happened is when you bit into this ball, this kind of slimy texture just sort of exploded from this thing. And it was one of the most unpleasant experiences I've ever had. Me and my friend both looked at each other. We were like, what was that? That made me want to be sick. I was very close to going to the bathroom and spitting that out. That was disgusting. Not the taste, but just the texture. It was so unexpected, and it was like slimy, but not in a good way. It was bad. See, anything slimy sort of maybe sometimes with seafood as well, some of those things like mussels, for example, I've never had mussels just because of the thought of the texture, not even the taste, just it looks slimy. So, for me, that's the no-go category, slime.

Andrew: To be honest, I didn't really get into that kind of seafood until I was probably around 35 years old. So, it took me a while. It was... I totally thought the same way that you did, but then something just kind of flipped in my brain, and it was like, it's OK. And I got into it. But I did think while you were talking there, one food item came to mind that actually I don't mind the taste of, but the texture and the feeling of it kind of creeps me out a little bit, and that is cotton candy. Yeah, I don't know. It's just like, I mean, it's so artificial, right? I think it's my body's natural reaction to being like, this is really an artificial, unnatural food. Don't eat this. Because it's just like nothing that you could find in nature. There's no fruit or anything that's similar to cotton candy. So, yeah, not like I'm eating cotton candy too often anyways, but occasionally when I have the opportunity to eat it, I usually just take a pass.

Anna: I think the only other thing that comes to mind that I absolutely can't stand, and this is partly a texture thing, and maybe you guys have this experience as well, I can't stand anything which is like a flan or a trifle where the sponge is soggy.

Andrew: OK.

Anna: Or like a quiche where you kind of have the baked bit at the bottom, but the liquid has kind of gone into the baked bit, and then it's kind of like soggy, baked. I mean, just awful. My grandmother makes this trifle every Christmas, and she's like, Anna, do you want some of this trifle? I'm like, no, I'm fine, thanks. You know, politely decline. And it's because of this texture, this kind of grainy texture of the... of the... the baked...

Andrew: Crust.

Anna: Yeah, something like that. And it's just soggy and it's grainy and it's just nasty. So, no flans for me, please. No flans, no quiches, no trifles. Thank you very much.

Andrew: All of those food items, for those of you who don't know what these foods are, kind of have like a crust and then some sort of filling on top of the crust, right? Maybe like a custard or a quiche is made with egg.

Anna: Just the thought in my head makes me want to be sick. No quiches, thank you very much. This is a quiche-free zone.

Andrew: Quiche-free zone. OK, well, let's change the topic then, Anna, away from quiche. And I thought we could maybe expand our perspective here and now talk about the role of touch in society and in relationships as well. And I don't know. How do you feel about touch between maybe not strangers but maybe acquaintances? Let's say you have a team project that you're working on in the office and you're working closely for a few weeks with some coworkers, your team members, and then maybe you finish the project, and you do your final presentation to the clients and it's successful. And then after the meeting is finished, maybe some of your teammates pat you on the back, for example. How would you feel about that kind of touch? Is that crossing a line? Do you have a boundary, a personal boundary, about touch from, you know, those kind of acquaintances, people that you have to work with them and you're close to an extent, but they're not your friends per se?

Anna: For me, it really depends. And I think I don't have a big problem with it because for me in that type of situation, it feels natural. And I'm also somebody that if I know you quite well or if I get to know you, I might sort of touch your arm or maybe your back or something like that because it just comes naturally for me to do that. However, I am conscious of the fact that other people really, really don't like being touched. Like if you don't know me or even if you're an acquaintance or even if we're colleagues and we've been working together for a long time, they don't like it and it makes them feel really uncomfortable. So, I'm always careful about the moments that I choose to do that.

And normally, I think it's something that you almost subconsciously realize is that some people are more open to it and some people are not. It's like, for example, I'm not a big hugger. And for me, it's very weird in Spain because I have a family member who I see often through the week. And in Spain, for example, it's very common when you see a person that you know well, you give the two kisses. And for me, I'm like, oh God, the two kisses again? I mean, really? Do we have to do it again? I saw you yesterday. And not only do they do it when you see them, but they also do it when you leave. So, for me, that kind of touch, the kisses on the cheek, for me is excessive. I'm not a fan of that. But, you know, a touch on the arm, a touch on the back, in that type of situation where maybe you're congratulating somebody, that's more familiar for me. But I do know that other people don't like it. So, I don't know. I kind of judge it, I think, sort of subconsciously almost. Some people seem more open to it and some people don't. But I would say that since I've been in Spain, which is a bit more of a **touchy-feely** type of culture, I think I've probably become a bit more **touchy-feely** as a result. But the kisses, I'm not a fan of the double kiss. Like every day when we arrive, when we see each other, and then when we leave again, I'm like, another kiss? Another one? Really? I only just met you. But no, that's how it works for me. What about for you, Andrew, in your experience?

Andrew: Yeah, just to highlight an expression that you used there Anna, "**Touchy-feely**." I love that one. That's a great expression. And it's just a phrase that we can use to describe people who are really physical with their contact, like to engage in physical

contact. And yeah, we could also use it to describe cultures as well. Maybe you could say Spain is a **touchy-feely** culture or is more **touchy-feely** compared to your home in the UK. And I never have lived in Europe, but I did live in Quebec in Canada. And of course, Quebec has this culture that originally comes from France. The Quebecois people, most of them also do the kiss on the cheek as a greeting. And I have to say that always felt really awkward to me as well. And I think it would be because it wasn't like something that was super standardized there. Like some people would do it and some people wouldn't. And so, you'd never know, like, is this something that we're doing or something that we're not doing? And then I had some friends who are like English speakers, or we'd call them Anglos. They grew up in this English culture. They're English speakers, but they live in Quebec, but they'd still do the kiss thing. And then that also felt like really awkward. Like, I don't know. So yeah, to me also, it was like really difficult to navigate that part of the culture as an outsider. And I never really felt comfortable doing it.

I have to say that here in Korea now, it is much, much less of a **touchy-feely** country than Canada is. In Canada, when I see my friends, it's like really common to greet them with a hug. I don't really greet strangers or people I'm meeting for the first time with a hug. I know that many people do that. But to me, that's kind of like my personal boundary. I don't want to hug somebody that I don't know very well or that I'm meeting for the first time. But I've seen that happen a lot of times in kind of social situations. Not a business situation, but a social situation. You're getting introduced to somebody for the first time, and I'll see people hug each other in that situation. But me, no, not so much. But my close friends or my good friends, when I see them, yeah, I love to give them a big hug. And that feels very natural for me.

But here in Korea, I don't know if I've ever hugged my Korean friends. Like, we wave to each other. Maybe you give them a pat on the back, like, see you later or something when you're saying goodbye to each other. But a big hug like that just doesn't really happen very often at all. And in a business situation, I guess a handshake is really common. But I would say an even more common kind of form of daily greeting is just a bow, right? Korea

is a country where bowing happens a lot. And I love that. You can do it from a distance, which is great. So, if somebody's sort of passing by at a distance, you don't have to yell out to them. You can just sort of make eye contact and do a little bow to acknowledge that person's existence, right? And yeah, I don't know. As not a really **touchy-feely** person myself, I think the level of **touchy-feeliness** in Korea really sort of matches up with me. So yeah, it's kind of funny how it varies from place to place to place. But yeah, that's been my observation, at least.

Anna: It's really interesting, like you said, because it's very different in different cultures. And I'd like to pick up on the point you mentioned there about navigating the contact, for example. And I remember having a few very awkward situations where I went for the double kiss, but the other person went for one kiss, then ended up practically kissing them on the lips. I mean, it was just an absolute disaster. I would say that over the time, I've become more of a hugger. And by the way, guys, we say "a hugger" as somebody who likes to give hugs. I remember that me and my best friend in the past, we were a little bit like you're saying in South Korea. We would just be like, "Hi!" But we wouldn't hug each other. It was kind of strange. But that was just the way that we did it. We were just both not huggers, and that's just kind of what we did. But then over time, actually, I remember that when I moved to Madrid and she came to visit me for the first time because we were living together before that, and I gave her a big hug when she got into the airport, and she was like, "Oh my goodness. She was like, what is this? What hug is this? Who have you become? You've only been here for like five months." So, we've become more huggy now, but I would say that throughout my life, I've been less of a hugger. And I do really like the handshake. The handshake is the best one because it's really neutral. It's a really polite way to meet new people, but it is difficult to navigate sometimes. It's like, do I go for the kiss? Do I go for the handshake? Are we on hugging terms? I'm quite happy to just say, "Hi, how are you?" No touch. That works perfectly for me. But especially here in Spain, it is very polite to give the double kiss, especially if it's somebody that's maybe in the family or whatever, but still in business, the handshake is the main way that people introduce

themselves. So, I'm good with that. I'm good with the handshake. I prefer that than the kiss. Kiss is too much. No more kisses.

Andrew: You know, I have to kind of correct myself when I was talking about Korea being a **touchy-feely** kind of place because I do think that it depends on the level of your relationship. And it's interesting, like compared to Canada, at least, there are a lot more gender segregated schools. So, it'll be really common for many students to go to a boys-only high school, for example, or a girls-only high school. And so, because of that, you get comfort between students. And so, I'll see high school guys walking together, and there'll be four of them in a row or five of them in a group, you know. And they all got their arms around each other, and they're patting each other on the back, and they're really **touchy-feely** in that kind of group among their friends. And I think back to when I was a high school student and like rubbing my friend's back as I talked to him would just be like, no, no, no, no. Like that's a no, no, for sure.

And I'll see girl high school students walking together, holding each other's hands. And it's nothing like sexual or anything like that. It's just sort of a sign of affection and a sign of closeness, I think. And yeah, I'll notice even people, especially if they're drinking alcohol a little bit, maybe this makes people feel more comfortable. I'm not sure, but you'll see some older guys, maybe they're friends, maybe from high school, and they'll be drinking together, and they're talking, and it'll be really common to like, maybe as they're talking, put their arm around each other and embrace each other in that way. And I think that just communicates closeness. And yeah, we don't really have that culture in Canada at all. So, on the surface, Korea is not very **touchy-feely**, but I think as you get closer in your relationships with other people, then maybe it does become more **touchy-feely**. But I guess that's probably true for everywhere around the world, right? Like the people that we are closest to, we like to embrace. That's just like a natural part of being human.

Anna: Absolutely. It depends on the level of the relationship you have with that person. And I remember one of my clients telling me once, and this was a person that used to

travel to different places around the world. So, they would meet lots of different people from lots of different nationalities. And he would always tell me, you know, British people, and this is a big generalization, of course, but in his experience, British people found it really hard to sort of express happiness, like hugging people or congratulating people. They were always a little bit awkward in that social interaction. Whereas I think one thing I really admire about Spanish people, again, in general, from my experience, is they're very good at navigating social situations. You know, meeting and greeting people, saying hello to people, that's one skill that I think is really drilled into their culture. And it's very nice. And I think that's why they have that reputation for being open and friendly and warm, is they're really good at navigating those social situations. Whereas places like the UK are known for being more reserved, are known for being less open, quite literally, you know, less huggy, less **touchy-feely**, a little bit more standoffish. That's actually a really nice adjective, guys, I'll just explain that because that's quite unusual. "Standoffish" is somebody who seems a little bit distant, almost like they're standing away from you, even though they're right there. And it's generally used in a negative way, but just a little bit standoffish, just a little bit reserved, not somebody that's very warm and friendly. So, it's interesting all the differences around the world in terms of the role of touch in relationships and society.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. Anna, I was thinking that during the pandemic, I'm sure a lot of people got less touch than they were used to, right? So many people were locked in their apartments, and they couldn't meet their friends, they couldn't meet their partners, they were just sort of by themselves. And there's this term that I've heard of before called touch starvation. And that just means a lack of physical touch between people. And so, I think during the pandemic, there were probably so many people who experienced touch starvation. And it seems like there are probably still many people who are starved for touch, maybe due to one reason or another, maybe depression or social anxiety. And I'm wondering if you think this could have an impact on our mental health and wellbeing. Do you think it's, like, vital for us as humans to touch one another and to have that physical

embrace with other people? Or is it not so important? Like, I know you're not a psychologist, but what's your gut feeling on this?

Anna: Well, my gut feeling is, of course, I mean, humans are social creatures. And even though some people are more introverted, and some people are more extroverted, we are still social creatures. We want that interaction with people. And it doesn't necessarily have to be touch. But there is that kind of tactile nature of being around people. And that gives us energy in some cases, or connection, right? And that's the thing that a lot of people lack is connection to other people. Like you said, I've gone through many points in my life where maybe I haven't had as many friends. And especially after the pandemic, I lost a lot of contact with key friends that I had. So, you know, I've gone through phases like that as well, where you kind of don't have as much connection with other people. Maybe it's just having a coffee or going for a walk with somebody or whatever. But sure, I mean, we're social creatures. I remember that when I was in the pandemic, I was in my flat alone for two months. I didn't see anyone for two months, which was intense. And I remember seeing my boyfriend after that and I was like, oh, it was just really weird to see a human being there. Like, I was like, "Oh, wow, you're real. I can touch you. You're human. You're alive. You have much longer hair than when I last saw you!" Because obviously there were no hairdressers. But yeah, definitely. Of course, it's important. Maybe not everybody likes it to the same level, but interaction and connection, I think is the key point here. Connection, which doesn't necessarily have to be through touch, but it can be, is so important for people.

Andrew: Yeah, I think it's one of those things that we **take for granted** and that we also maybe don't realize just how important it is. It's like, you don't know what you've got until it's gone, right? And when we lose that ability to connect with other people through touch, then yeah, I think that can depress us and just make us feel like incomplete humans. I know one of my favorite parts of my day is when my wife wakes up in the morning and then I can give her a big hug. It's like a great way to start the day with that little squeeze in the morning, you know? It's a great way to get things going. And I think if I didn't have that,

and I know at certain points in my life, when I was single, I didn't have that, and there's a difference for sure when you can access human touch and when it's not available to you, there's definitely a difference.

And Anna, just a moment ago, we were talking about the pandemic and lockdown, and during that time, so many of us turned to technology to try and get our fix of human connection, right? We were on Zoom and online all the time, and that was the way that we communicated. And in so many ways, it was an amazing technological jump that we took during that time, being able to talk through the internet with other people and see them and do these face calls and voice conferencing and all of these things. But we don't have that touch sensation yet with technology. I'm just wondering, what do you think will happen when it comes to touch and technology? Do you think one day in the future we'll maybe develop like a virtual hug or some kind of device that could mimic human touch or maybe even satisfy that need that we have for connection through touch?

Anna: Oh, absolutely. I don't think there's any question. I mean, of course, we're keeping this in the PG zone. There's obviously other things. Other things are already being developed in other areas, so I think it will just be an extension of that. It will be maybe like we were saying before we started recording today, there'll be a blanket which you can put on and it will mimic getting a hug, for example, or maybe there'll be some kind of, you know, person that you can hug or something like this, or... Absolutely, because I think in the future, my view is people will have fewer social connections and already people are finding it hard to connect with people, whether that's to find a relationship, a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or just finding friends, actually. I think people find it really difficult to find friends, especially people that work online, for example, because when you think about it, I met a lot of my friends through work. And so, if you're a completely remote worker, it can be very difficult to establish that same type of connection. So yeah, I definitely think there'll be things in the future to mimic that type of touch, for example. Absolutely. Do you think so as well, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, and it's interesting. We were chatting a little bit before we hit the record button here, Anna, and we were talking about how it seems like with other senses, when we're thinking about our sense of sight, or maybe not so much with smell, but definitely with vision, I think, we've seen huge jumps in the level of technology, right? If you think about video games, for example, video game graphics have just excelled, gone from very, very basic to just amazing within the last 30 years. Same with VR. We can go out and get a VR headset now. We can put it on our face, and we can be immersed in these virtual worlds that are almost indistinguishable from the real world. But in terms of touch, we haven't really seen the same level of technological developments. I remember when I played video games back when I was younger, which is a long time ago now, but when I first started playing video games, you just had your basic controller. But then when I was a teenager, there was this invention called the rumble pack, and you could buy this little cartridge that you would put into your controller, and you'd put a battery in there, and then it would make your controller shake. Maybe you were shooting a gun in the game. Then your controller would vibrate whenever you pulled the trigger of the gun. And I think that was a huge development that was really cool at the time, but there hasn't been a huge increase in that kind of touch sensation that you get from playing video games other than just that vibration. And video games these days are still the same way. You get a little vibration, but not much more, so. I mean, we've had iPads as well, right, and touchscreens. I guess those are really interesting new technologies related to touch. But other than that, we haven't seen it. So, I guess that means there's a lot of opportunities out there, and it will be interesting to see what happens in the future. But I got to say, it creeps me out. I don't like the idea of a robot coming around and, like, giving me a massage or something. Giving me a hug. I don't know. It's really creepy to think about.

Anna: Sounds weird now, but maybe 10 years down the line, everybody's going to be queuing up to get these little hugging robots.

Andrew: I don't know.

Anna: Yeah. It seems weird now, but it's true that I guess maybe one of the biggest challenges is it has to be like a wearable thing. So, I think maybe that's one of the reasons why the technology hasn't taken off, is it's like, well, to get touch, it has to be something that you put directly on your skin or on your body. And thus, I don't know, you could replicate it by putting some kind of chip in your brain or something. So, I guess maybe that's one of the drawbacks, is it has to be a wearable in some cases, which just means it'd be very expensive. So, I don't know. It will be interesting to see. Maybe you guys know of any technology or exciting research that's coming out right now that you can tell us about. But yeah, it will be interesting to see where that goes in the future.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah. It'll be definitely interesting. But I have to say, like, a lot of times when we talk about the future and technology on Culips here, we're always like, "Oh, it seems creepy!" But this one seems the most creepy to me, I think, so far about being touched by a robot or something. But hey, you never know. It could be a great development. And like, even newborn babies, newborn babies have to have human touch, right? I know, I think it was Kassy, our co-host here at Culips, she was telling me that after her newborn was born just several months ago, that immediately you put it onto your chest, you put the baby onto your chest for that skin-to-skin contact with the mom and the dad. And that's one of the first things you do with the newborn baby. Who knows about, like, maybe in the future robots could do this for us. Maybe there's an orphan baby or something and there's no parent available. Maybe the robot could take over. I don't know. I don't know if I like that future or not, but we'll see what happens. That's all we can do, right? Is wait and see.

OK, Anna, we have some rapid-fire bonus questions here just for Culips members as a way to say thank you guys for your support. So, the first question I want to ask you, Anna, is here in South Korea, there's this trend of barefoot walking, especially with older folk. I don't see too many younger people doing this, but like grandmas and grandpas, there's these paths that you can see in some parks that are set up for walking barefoot in this kind of red mud. And I guess the idea is that this mud is good for your feet and it's probably

good for your body and your gait to walk barefoot. I'm not really 100% sure about the science behind it, but I've noticed a lot of old people walking on these muddy trails. What are your thoughts on going barefoot? Like getting that physical touch, that contact between our bodies and the physical earth, but not with our hands, right? We've been talking just about our hands for most of this episode, but what about with our feet, which is the area of our body that's always in contact with the ground, almost always?

Anna: Yeah, I'm going to take a pass on that one, I think, especially in the middle of Madrid. I think the only thing I would be getting on my feet would be glass and dog poo. So, I think I'll keep my shoes on in the middle of Madrid. However, I do like walking barefoot on grass, for example. Grass is really, really nice. That texture and the feel of grass underneath your feet is really lovely. So, if I'm in a park in maybe spring and summer, I like to take my shoes off and just kind of feel the grass on my feet. But I do think, I think you're right. I think there's something about it's very good for your feet to actually be barefoot and to walk like that. It can be very, very beneficial. But yeah, I'm not going to be doing that in the middle of Madrid. I think that would, I think I would end up in a hospital with some kind of infection and cuts and things like this. But it sounds, I mean, I've never heard of this, that there's some kind of dedicated barefoot walking muddy paths. Like, that sounds so interesting. I've never heard of that before.

Andrew: I guess it's more like a clay. It's like a very stiff, kind of hard, muddy clay.

Anna: Andrew, what about, let's talk about mattresses, because this is something that's also very personal and it's also to do with texture and feel. So, in English, guys, we have three adjectives that maybe we would use to describe mattresses. And remember a mattress is what you sleep on when you go to bed. So, we normally categorize them as soft, medium, or firm. So, what's your preference, Andrew, in terms of a mattress?

Andrew: Firm, for sure. As hard as a rock. The harder, the better. Are you the same way?

Anna: Absolutely. Like a brick, OK? I don't want any **give**. I don't want it to be super soft. And actually, this is something that's changed because in the past, I used to want a soft, a really soft mattress. But then I remember my friend, I stayed at my friend's house, and she had this bed that was like really, really firm. And I had like the best night's sleep ever. And since then, I've never looked back. So really firm mattress, like you said, hard as a rock, like a brick. I don't want any **give**, nothing whatsoever. That's my absolute favorite. And I just sleep so much better that way. And I think it's supposed to be better for you. I'm not sure, but if it's better for your back or something like this, but I'm gonna go with that anyway, that it's better for me to be firm rather than soft. Very soft pillow though. I have a very, very soft pillow, but the mattress, a brick.

Andrew: Interesting. Yeah. I like that expression that you just used as well, Anna, "I don't want for the mattress to have any **give**." And "**give**" is not talking about exchanging a present or anything like this. Here "**give**" means flexibility, right? So, if a mattress **has some give**, it means that when you sit on it or lie on it, it's going to change its shape. It's probably going to sink down like a soft mattress would if you were to lie down on it. But a firm mattress is gonna have no **give** and it's not going to sink down at all. It's just going to maintain that firm shape. So yeah, I'm totally right there with you. A mattress with no **give** is the way to go. And actually, my wife and I were traveling not too long ago and in our hotel room, we had a soft mattress. And it's just terrible when you have two people on a soft mattress because it turns into a kind of taco shell, you know? And then you both sink towards the middle of the bed. And yeah, we're both firm mattress people so it wasn't too comfy. And I'd wake up every day with a sore back. I'd complain about my sore back like an old man. So yeah, it's got to be firm.

Anna: And I was actually thinking something that came into my head then was another thing about texture is I'm very picky about the texture of the sheets. So, I cannot stand anything that's like a very cheap fabric. And I actually went through a phase when I was about in my early 20s. So, I'm kind of like an old soul, by the way, guys. An old soul is somebody who does things that they would do at a much older age. And I remember I

went through a brushed cotton phase in my early 20s. And brushed cotton is like a really nice soft cotton that you can have for your bedsheets. And I think I remember that for my sort of 23rd birthday, I bought myself a really expensive pair of brushed cotton sheets. And my friends were all laughing at me. They're like, "Anna, I mean, maybe you could go on a little trip, you know, or maybe you want to, I don't know, go out or go for a meal. But no, you spend your money on brushed cotton sheets." But I was happy. I was super happy. I loved them. Yeah. So yeah, brushed cotton is the way to go.

Andrew: Well, we spend a lot of our time sleeping. So, it's important to have good bedding. You got your priorities in order from a young age, I think.

Anna: Well, maybe you could say it like that. Or maybe I was just a little bit, a little bit of an old lady in my early 20s. But oh, well, what can you do?

Andrew: Talking about hotel beds, here's another thing that I hate the feeling of. You know, when you get into a hotel bed and the sheets are tucked so tight and they're like tucked all under the mattress.

Anna: Oh, no.

Andrew: There's no flexibility and no way to move. That feeling I really, really hate. I guess that's more of like a claustrophobic feeling, but.

Anna: Can't stand that. That's horrible. Yeah. No. How could anyone sleep like that? Like I have to wrap the duvet around me like several times. Like there has to, for me, I have a huge duvet for the size of my bed because I kind of wrap myself up like a sort of burrito or something. Like I have to have the wrap ability. It can't be like my friend who just sort of lies in bed straight and then she just doesn't move. So, she's just like mummification and she just... you're like, "Are you alive? Like, are you breathing?" Because she's just laid there for sort of eight hours, and she doesn't move. No. No way. Absolutely not.

Andrew: Yeah. Got to have the flexibility.

Anna: Mm-hmm.

Andrew: Very good. Well, Anna, I think we'll leave it here for today. So, thanks everybody for listening all the way to the end. Good job on completing this English lesson with me and with Anna. And guys, we'll talk to you in the next episode. Goodbye.

Anna: Bye, guys. See you soon.

Detailed Explanations

Once you go ... you can't go back / there's no going back

Expression

In the episode, Anna says, “**Once you go** cashmere, that’s it. **You can’t go back.**” She’s talking about how cashmere feels so soft and comfortable that after wearing it, other clothes don’t feel as good. She means that once you experience something high-quality or very enjoyable, it’s hard to enjoy regular things again.

Once you go [something], you can’t go back is an informal expression that means after trying something really good, you won’t want to return to what you had before. This is because the new thing is so much better, and your standards or expectations have changed.

This phrase is commonly used in daily conversation to give strong opinions or recommendations, especially about things people really enjoy. It follows a simple pattern: **Once you go** + [great thing] + **you can’t go back**. For example, “**Once you go** French press coffee, **you can’t go back.**” This means that you won’t want to drink instant or drip coffee anymore once you’ve tried French press style coffee. Or, “**Once you go** first class, **there’s no going back** to economy.” This means one experience in first class on a plane will ruin the experience of flying economy. This expression is a way to say, “This is way better, and now I want it all the time!”

This expression is often used in English when people try something better than what they’re used to—whether it’s clothes, food, travel, or technology—and then don’t want to return to the old way.

Here are a few more examples with **once you go [something], you can’t go back / there’s no going back**:

Lena: I finally tried fresh pasta at that new Italian place last night.

Ethan: Oh yeah? Was it good?

Lena: So good. I’m serious—**once you go** fresh pasta, **you can’t go back.**

Marcus: I got a standing desk for work last week.

Ava: Really? Do you actually use it?

Marcus: Yeah, all the time. It makes such a difference. **Once you go** standing desk, **there’s no going back** to sitting all day.

To make someone gag

Verb

Andrew tells Anna that his brother couldn't eat mashed potatoes until recently because something about the texture "**would make him gag.**" He means that the feeling of mashed potatoes in his mouth made his brother feel like he was going to throw up. Even though he liked other kinds of potatoes, mashed potatoes had a texture that was so uncomfortable for him, it made him feel sick. **It makes me gag** is common way to describe a strong, negative reaction to something—especially food or smell.

To make someone gag means to cause a person to feel like they're going to vomit or throw up. You don't always actually throw up, but your body feels like you might. It usually happens when you see, smell, taste, or even think about something really disgusting or upsetting.

We use "**make someone gag**" when something is so gross or unpleasant that it makes you feel sick. For example, you can say, "The smell of rotten eggs **made me gag,**" or "Just the thought of eating snails **makes me gag.**"

This expression comes from the natural reflex in your throat called the "gag reflex." It's the feeling your body has when something touches the back of your mouth or throat, and it tries to stop you from swallowing it. Over time, people started using "gag" to describe any strong feeling of disgust, even when you're not really choking or about to vomit.

Some other ways to express this strong feeling of disgust include "It turns my stomach" (It makes me feel sick), "It grosses me out" (It disgusts me), and "I can't stomach it" (I really can't handle it).

Be careful not to use this expression with strangers, at work, or in polite company. For instance, it would sound quite rude if someone offered you oysters at a party and you said, "No thanks, they **make me gag.**" This is an extreme and exaggerated expression and is best used in casual conversation.

Here are a couple more examples with **to make someone gag**:

Sofia: My little brother ate ketchup on ice cream yesterday.

Liam: Ew! That would **make me gag.**

Ryan: Are there any foods you used to hate as a kid that you enjoy now?

Grace: Oh, definitely. I used to hate broccoli. The texture and smell used to **make me gag.** Now I love it!

To put someone over the edge

Idiomatic verb

When Andrew is talking about his brother, he says that “something about [the texture of mashed potatoes] **put him over the edge**.” Andrew means that the texture of mashed potatoes was too much for his brother. There could have been other factors that made him dislike mashed potatoes, such as the flavor, but the texture was the final thing that made him feel sick. He didn’t just dislike mashed potatoes – they **put him over the edge**.

To put someone over the edge means to cause a person to have a strong reaction because it was *too much* for them to handle. Sometimes, the person is already close to feeling upset or uncomfortable, and then one small thing happens that makes it so much worse. That final thing pushes them “**over the edge**”—like tipping a full cup until it spills.

We often use “**put someone over the edge**” when talking about emotions like stress, anger, fear, disgust, or even sadness. It describes the moment when someone can’t take it anymore. For example, if you’re having a bad day and then someone cuts in front of you in line, that small action might **put you over the edge**, and you finally lose your patience and start yelling at the other person or crying.

Or imagine a student who studies all night for a test, forgets to eat breakfast, and then spills coffee on their notes—that last accident might be what **puts them over the edge** and makes them break down.

The idea comes from the image of standing at the edge of a cliff. If you are already very close to falling, just a little push can make you fall off. That small push is what “**puts you over the edge**.”

Here are a couple more examples with **to put someone over the edge**:

Emma: I got into a big fight with my roommate.

Keith: What happened?

Emma: I’ve been getting frustrated with her because she always leaves the kitchen messy and rarely cleans the bathroom. Then, the other day when she was actually cleaning for once, I saw her using my toothbrush to scrub the bathroom sink. That **put me over the edge** and I started yelling at her.

Mindy: How’s the diet going?

Harry: I was doing alright, but then someone brought donuts to work and that **put me over the edge**. I ended up giving into temptation and eating four.

Touchy-feely

Adjective

Anna says that Spain has a more “**touchy-feely**” type of culture than the U.K., and she thinks she’s become more **touchy-feely** since living there. For example, in Spain, it’s normal to greet people with kisses on the cheek or light touches on the arm or back. Even though this kind of physical contact didn’t feel natural to her at first, over time she got more used to it and became more **touchy-feely**.

The expression “**touchy-feely**” describes someone who likes to touch others in a friendly way or show emotions and affection with hugs, pats, or hand-holding. It can also describe a culture or place where people are more open about physical contact. For example, in some countries like Spain or Italy, people might greet each other with hugs or kisses, so we can say those cultures are more **touchy-feely**. In other countries, like Japan or Korea, people usually don’t touch each other much when they meet, so they are not very **touchy-feely**.

The word **touchy-feely** is informal and often used in conversations. You can use it to talk about people (“She’s very **touchy-feely** with her friends”) or places (“France is more **touchy-feely** than the UK”). Sometimes it’s used in a positive way to describe someone warm and caring, but it can also sound a little negative if the person saying it doesn’t like a lot of touching. For instance, “He’s always hugging his coworkers at work. Honestly, it feels a little too **touchy-feely** for the office.”

To remember this phrase, just break it into two easy words: *touchy* (likes to touch) and *feely* (shows feelings). If someone is **touchy-feely**, they show their care and affection by hugging, touching, or being physically close to others.

Here are a couple more examples with **touchy-feely**:

Zoey: I don’t know why, but I just don’t like it when people I barely know hug me.

Nathan: Yeah, me too. Some people are just way too **touchy-feely**.

Zoey: Exactly. A handshake is enough!

Sam: I like how **touchy-feely** your family is.

Nina: Thanks! Yeah, we always give each other big hugs when we see each other.

Sam: It’s really sweet. Mine is not like that, but I kind of wish we were.

To take something for granted

Expression

In the episode, Andrew says “I think [physical contact with other people] is one of those things that we **take for granted** and that we also maybe don't realize just how important it is.” He means that before the pandemic, many people didn't realize how lucky they were to be around friends, family, and coworkers. When those things were taken away, people started to feel lonely and sad, craving human connection and touch. After being alone for a long time, Andrew noticed how special a simple hug or a conversation could be. He realized that he **had taken** those small moments **for granted** before.

To take something for granted means to not notice how important or special something is because you have it all the time. You think it will always be there, so you stop paying attention to it. People often take everyday things for granted—like clean water, good health, or seeing their loved ones. They don't think about how lucky they are to have those things until they're gone or until something changes.

This expression is used when someone doesn't fully appreciate what they have. It can be about big things or small things. For example, if someone always has food on the table, they might **take it for granted** and not realize how hard it is for others who don't. Or if a friend is always there to help, you might forget to say thank you because you've gotten used to their support. In other words, you've begun **to take** your friend **for granted**.

The phrase comes from the verb *grant*, which means to give something. If something is *granted*, it's given to you. So if you **take something for granted**, it means you believe it will always be given to you.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take something for granted**:

Fred: You forgot my birthday... again.

Beth: Oh god, I'm so sorry. I've just been really busy.

Fred: I understand you're busy, but I still want to feel important to you. **Don't take me for granted.**

Lois: My grandma was in the hospital last month, and it really scared me.

Connor: Oh no. Is she okay now?

Lois: Yes, she's much better, thankfully. But it made me realize how much I **take her for granted**. She's always been there, and I didn't always show how much I appreciate her.

To have give

Verb

At the end of the episode, Andrew and Anna discuss mattress textures and firmness. Anna says she likes a very firm mattress. She says she doesn't want her mattress **to have any give**. Andrew agrees and explains what that means. He says, "If a mattress **has some give**, it means that when you sit on it or lie on it, it's going to change its shape." So, in this case, "give" is NOT about giving a gift. It means *flexibility* or *softness*—how much something moves, bends, or sinks when you press it. A mattress with "**no give**" is very hard and stays firm. A mattress "**with give**" is softer and will sink a little when you lie down on it.

To have give means that something can bend, move, or change shape when you push or press on it. It is often used when talking about materials like mattresses, cushions, shoes, sofas, or even foods. For example, if you press down on a soft chair and it goes down a little, that means the chair **has some give**. If it feels totally hard, then it **has no give**.

Another example is shoes. When you buy new shoes, they might feel quite stiff and uncomfortable to wear. There **isn't much give**. However, after consistently wearing them for a few weeks, you'll break them in and the shoes will **have a bit more give**.

You can even use this expression to talk about the firmness of foods. For instance, when you're selecting an avocado at the store, you want to choose one that isn't hard as a rock. A ripe avocado should **have a little give to it** when you press it with your thumb. In other words, it should feel slightly soft and pressable.

This usage of "**give**" comes from the idea of a material "**giving way**" or moving a little under pressure. It has nothing to do with giving gifts. It refers to the material allowing movement instead of staying stiff or hard.

Here are a couple more examples with **to have give**:

Rudy: These leather boots are nice, but they're kind of stiff.

Wendy: Yeah, new leather often **has no give**. They'll soften after a few wears.

Robert: This mango looks good, but I'm not sure if it's ready.

Monica: Give it a gentle squeeze. **Does it have some give?**

Robert: Yeah, a little.

Monica: Then it should be sweet and juicy!

Expressions Quiz

1. Which situation best shows the meaning of “to make someone gag”?
 - a) Hearing a funny joke and laughing.
 - b) Seeing a cute puppy and smiling.
 - c) Smelling spoiled milk and almost throwing up.
 - d) Eating delicious cake.

2. Fill in the blank: “This peach is ready to eat. It’s not too hard—it has just the right amount of _____.”
 - a) pressure
 - b) give
 - c) stretch
 - d) soft

3. Your mother says, “Don’t take me for granted.” What does she mean?
 - a) She wants you to remember to appreciate her and not ignore what she does.
 - b) She wants you to ask for more help.
 - c) She doesn’t want you to give her a gift.
 - d) She wants you to do everything by yourself from now on.

4. Which sentence correctly uses “touchy-feely”?
 - a) The phone is touchy-feely because it has a touchscreen.
 - b) He’s touchy-feely about spicy food.
 - c) She’s really touchy-feely—she always shakes hands at meetings.
 - d) He’s touchy-feely and gives big hugs even to people he just met.

5. Your friend says, “Once you go noise-canceling headphones, you can’t go back.” What does your friend mean?
 - a) After you try noise-canceling headphones, regular ones won’t feel good anymore.
 - b) It’s impossible to return the headphones to the store.
 - c) Noise-canceling headphones are too expensive to buy more than once.
 - d) You should never use headphones again.

Listening Comprehension Quiz

6. What is Andrew's opinion of cashmere after trying his wife's scarf?
7. Anna mentions a type of food texture she really dislikes. What is it?
8. What's Anna's personal opinion of the double cheek kiss tradition in Spain?
9. What new behavior did Anna develop after moving to Spain?
10. What kind of mattress do both Anna and Andrew prefer?

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite texture to touch? Is it soft, rough, smooth, or something else? What's your least favorite texture? Why?
2. Have you ever eaten something with a texture you didn't expect? Did it make you gag or surprise you in a good way?
3. Is your culture particularly **touchy-feely**? Do you like to be with **touchy-feely** people or do you prefer to keep physical contact at a minimum? Please describe.
4. Do you think technology will ever be able to replace real human touch, like hugs? Why or why not?
5. What's something you used **to take for granted** before the COVID-19 pandemic? How do you see it differently now?

Quiz Answers

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

6. He thought it was soft and luxurious.

7. Slimy foods.

8. She doesn't like it and finds it excessive.

9. She became more "huggy." She didn't used to like hugging much, but she began to hug people more often and got used to it.

10. Both Andrew and Anna prefer very firm mattresses.

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