

Catch Word #258 – Sweating bullets

Episode description

“I was so nervous. I was sweating bullets!” That might sound a bit strange, but it’s a common English expression. Sweating bullets means to be very stressed or nervous. Does that happen to you sometimes? In this Catch Word episode, Andrew and Kassy teach you two idioms with the word *sweat*: no sweat and sweating bullets. After this episode, you’ll know how to use these expressions perfectly!

Catch Word is the Culips vocabulary series that teaches you idioms, expressions, and phrasal verbs that are useful in everyday life. Improve your English, grow your word power, get fluent faster with Catch Word!

Fun fact

Do you know that you have anywhere between 2 to 5 million sweat glands in your body? But don’t worry, even though many people don’t like sweating, it is a healthy part of life.

Expressions included in the study guide

- No sweat
- A twist on [something]
- To veg out
- On [its] last legs
- Sweating bullets
- Knock on wood



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: Hello, there everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Welcome back to Culips. This is Catch Word, the series for intermediate and advanced English learners, where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, and expressions that will help improve your English listening and speaking. Joining me today is my cohost, Kassy. Hey there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey Andrew, and hey, listeners. It's been a minute since our last Catch Word episode Andrew, how have you been?

Andrew: I'm great, Kassy, but to be honest with you, it was a little cold here in the morning. So, I turned my heater on. But I think that was a mistake because now in my little recording room here it's really hot and stuffy and I kind of feel like I'm sitting in a sauna. So, I might have to go take a break later and turn that heater down.

Kassy: Sounds good. But actually, that's perfect, because today we're going to be teaching everyone two idiomatic expressions that use the word, sweat. Although they're not exactly about perspiring. By the way listeners, the word perspiring means sweating. Sweat is kind of a common, basic, everyday word and perspiring is that higher-level SAT kind of word that we use to talk about medical conditions mostly.

Andrew: We'll get to our lesson in just a moment, everyone. But don't forget that there is a study guide and transcript for this episode that's available to all Culips members. And we recommend following along with the guide, as you listen to this lesson today. And if you're not a member yet, but you want to join, you can find all the details and learn about the benefits of becoming a member on our website which is, Culips.com. C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Kassy: And we want to give a shout out to one of our listeners named Frank who left us an awesome review and five-star rating on Apple Podcasts. Frank wrote.

Andrew: "Hi, team. My name is Frank. I'm Cuban but I recently moved to Miami, Florida. My native language is Spanish. And I've been working as a truck driver, an 18-wheeler for almost a year, I started listening to this show in 2021 and I love it. I never miss any brand-

new episodes. I'm hitting the road with the show in my ears. I want to thank you all for helping us to improve our English knowledge in each lesson. Thank you so much."

Kassy: Wow, thanks for the support, Frank, we really do appreciate it. And we're happy to hear that you've been learning a lot with Culips. And thanks to all of you that have been supporting Culips by leaving comments and reviews on your favourite podcast app. It's really helpful for letting other English learners around the world connect and study with us, so keep up the great work. And now let's get started with today's lesson.

Andrew: So Kassy, as you mentioned at the top of the show, our theme for today is to teach all of our listeners two idiomatic expressions that have the word sweat inside the expressions. Now, they're not necessarily about the physical act of sweating, although it's a little bit related to that. And we'll give some more details about that in a moment but the connection here for this episode is that the two expressions contain the word sweat. And the first expression is an easy one and a really, really common one. And I was shocked to learn that we haven't covered it on Culips before, better late than never, I suppose. And without any further ado, I will introduce it. It is, **no sweat**, OK? No sweat, no sweat. And Kassy, you can imagine somebody who's sweating a lot would be very wet, right? Kind of wet and why would they be wet and sweaty? Well, maybe because they're doing something really physical like exercising, moving their body a lot. Or maybe they're even in just a really stressful situation. All of these kinds of conditions people sweat in, right? But if you have no sweat, well then you are probably very dry and comfortable. Why are you dry and comfortable? Well, you haven't been doing anything that makes you exert yourself and makes you feel tired and forces your body to perspire. So, no sweat is like a very relaxed, easy condition, right? And so, when we use this expression, no sweat usually it is in response to when somebody says thank you to us. So, "Aw thank you for helping me." You can reply, "No sweat." And what you are communicating is like it was really easy. It was really simple. Whatever I was helping you with, you didn't even have to say thank you to me, right? It's like no problem. No sweat.

Kassy: Yeah, I was gonna say that it's really similar to the expression, no problem.

Andrew: Yeah, almost exactly the same. Now, this is a very casual expression. And I would encourage our listeners not to use it in professional situations, maybe in some business situations, it could sound a little bit too casual. But definitely when you're talking with people you're close to or your friends, then it is a great one to use.

Kassy: Yeah, I completely agree. And if listeners are interested in learning another format, I think a similar expression to no sweat would be, don't sweat it, which also means like, don't worry about it so much. It's kind of **a twist on that** but has a very similar meaning.

Andrew: Exactly. That's a great point. So, no sweat, we usually say in response to when somebody is thanking us, right? "Oh, thank you for your help." "Yeah, no problem, no sweat." And don't sweat it, we can also use in that situation, right? Like, "Oh, thank you so

much for your help." I could say "Oh, don't sweat it." Meaning like, don't worry about having to say thank you for me, it was such a small thing. You don't even need to say thank you. And we can also use don't sweat it when somebody is worried about something, right? Maybe Kassy, you're like worried about an upcoming presentation that you have to make and I can say to you, "Kassy, like, don't sweat it, you'll be fine." Right? It's like don't get worried about it, don't get anxious about it.

Kassy: Well, Andrew, shall we listen to our first example conversation?

Andrew: Yeah, let's take a listen to this example conversation with the expression, no sweat.

Neighbour 1: Thanks again for helping me move my old sofa to the curb yesterday. I really appreciate it.

Neighbour 2: Yeah, **no sweat**. I'm happy to help. How's your new couch by the way?

Neighbour 1: It's amazing. It's perfect for **vegging out** on when watching Netflix after work. I love it.

Neighbour 2: Sounds great. I'm glad that you're enjoying it.

Neighbour 1: Well, I'm going to go down to the supermarket. See you later. And thanks again.

Neighbour 2: Yeah, have a good one.

Andrew: In this example, we hear two neighbors speaking with each other. And I get the impression, Kassy, that maybe they are just outside of their apartment building or something and they have a little conversation. And in that conversation, one of the neighbours thanks the other one for helping her move her old sofa to the curb. Now the curb is the area on the street where the sidewalk and the street meet and that's the area where we usually throw out our trash and our garbage in North America. I don't know about where you're from in the USA, Kassy, but where I'm from in Canada, a couple of times a year, there will be an opportunity to throw out larger pieces of furniture. So, if you have old furniture and you need to clean that out, you can put it on the side of the road on the curb and the city will come and pick it up for you.

Kassy: Yeah, it's the same in the US.

Andrew: Same in the US, great. So, that's what this woman did. She threw out her old sofa. She moved it to the curb and her neighbour helped her do that. So, to show her appreciation, she said thank you and the neighbour responded by saying, no sweat. I was happy to help. Oh, it just means like, no problem. No big deal, don't worry about it. It's just that way to respond to someone saying thank you to you.

Kassy: Exactly. There was also another really good phrase in this example conversation that we should mention Andrew, and that is **vegging out**, vegging out.

Andrew: Yeah, the neighbour said the new sofa is perfect for vegging out. Kassy, I love vegging out personally. How about you?

Kassy: Yep, one of my favourite pastimes.

Andrew: And vegging out just means relaxing, right? Deeply relaxing, maybe wearing your pajamas or something comfortable and just watching TV or reading a book while being in a very deep state of relaxation.

Kassy: You know, Andrew, it's kind of weird, two of our most famous phrases I guess you'd say for being lazy on the couch would be being a couch potato, or vegging out, and both of them have this vegetable feeling to them. I wonder why English is like that, kind of weird.

Andrew: It is a weird coincidence. And another thing that's kind of ironic, Kassy, is that when you are vegging out, or at least when I veg out, I very rarely eat vegetables. I'm usually eating some unhealthy snack food and not snacking on carrots and celery, for example. Shall we listen to the second example conversation now?

Kassy: Yep, let's do it.

Coworker 1: Could you give me a hand for a moment?

Coworker 2: Sure, **no sweat**. How can I help?

Coworker 1: The plants near the reception desk look like they haven't been watered in like a year. Could you help me bring them to the staff room? I'm gonna give them some water there.

Coworker 2: Good idea. They look like they're **on their last leg**. I have a box in my office we can use to move them to the staff room. I'll go grab it and meet you in near reception.

Coworker 1: OK, great. See you there.

Kassy: All right. In this example conversation, two coworkers are talking about their dying plants. One coworker asks another hey, could you help me take these plants to the staff room to water them? The other coworker replies, no sweat, no problem. I'll gladly help.

Andrew: Exactly. And in that example, conversation, there was another interesting expression that we heard. And that was, "It looks like the plants are on their last leg." And that could be really confusing to understand, because first of all, plants don't have legs, right? So what are you talking about then? Second of all, like, what does it mean to be on your last leg? Well, that's just an idiomatic expression that means to be close to death. So, you can imagine in an office, you know, many offices have houseplants decorating the office, but because they're in that shared space, sometimes people don't take responsibility for them, right? And they can, unfortunately, be ignored and it's not until they're almost dead, until they're on their last leg that someone will say, "Oh, man, we need to water these plants." So, I think that's what was happening in that example.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: Perfect. Well, why don't we move on to our second key expression for this episode, it's another one with the word sweat. And this one is a little bit closer to our traditional understanding of what it means to sweat, I guess, expression number two is, **sweating bullets**. Sweating bullets, and sweating bullets means to be very stressed out, or very anxious, or very worried about something. If you're sweating bullets, it means you're in a real state of high stress, high anxiety. And you're very, very worried about something.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. I just imagined just like, giant droplets of sweat leaking out of your body, you're so stressed.

Andrew: Yes, you're very stressed out, and maybe your whole forehead is just leaking. It's kind of interesting, because the word that we use to describe a lot of sweat coming out of the body is beads of sweat, right? Those little droplets of water that come out of maybe your forehead, for example, we'd call that a bead of sweat. However, in this situation, we say sweating bullets, and it's talking about the same thing, like drops of sweat but we can imagine a lot like a very, very, very stressful situation, almost like to the point where you don't really ever see it in real life. Like I don't know if I've ever actually seen someone sweating bullets like that. Maybe I've seen it in like a cartoon or something, but not in real life. But we can just use that imagery of somebody really, really sweating a lot to communicate that that person is panicked or stressed.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: So, with that being said, Kassy why don't we take a listen to our first example conversation using this expression, sweating bullets?

Kassy: Let's do it.

Roommate 1: Have you seen my phone around here? I've been looking for it for the last 20 minutes and I can't find it anywhere.

Roommate 2: I haven't seen it. But yeah, I'll help you. Let's look around together.

Roommate 1: Thanks. I need to find it quickly. I have a job interview in an hour and the address is written down on my phone. If I can't find it fast, I'm going to be late.

Roommate 2: All right, just calm down. Let me call it and we can follow the ring.

Roommate 1: Good thinking.

Roommate 2: Oh, I hear it

Roommate 1: I found it! Oh my god, thank you so much. I was sweating bullets there for a moment.

Roommate 2: No problem. Good luck at your interview.

Andrew: So, we just heard an example conversation where two roommates are looking for a lost phone. And it is very important that they find that phone quickly because the person who lost the phone, well, she has a job interview in an hour. And the address for the job interview location is stored in her phone. So, if she can't find the phone, it's a big problem. So, Kassy, you could put yourself into this situation, right? Like you have a job interview. You can't find your phone. That's bad enough, just if you have a job interview and you can't find your phone. But on top of that, if the job location address is stored in your phone, then well, that's a very stressful situation. So, in the example conversation then, she was sweating bullets. She even said, "I was sweating bullets there for a moment before they found the phone." So, she was very panicked, very stressed, very anxious. But then when she found the phone, everything was good. And she was OK again. Kassy, I think that's a really common way that we use this expression is to use it in the past tense to talk about a situation in which we were really stressed, or in which we were really anxious, right? Like, oh, I was sweating bullets but now I'm OK. Or I was sweating bullets, but it's fine now, something like that.

Kassy: I agree. I also think that people might use this a lot before doing something important. For example, maybe before a school musical performance. You're waiting to go on stage, and you could be like, "Oh my gosh, I'm sweating bullets. I'm so nervous. What if I don't remember my lines?" Something along that nature.

Andrew: Perfect example. Exactly. So, should we listen to the final example conversation for today's episode?

Kassy: Yes.

Friend 1: How was your day today?

Friend 2: Well, something kinda crazy happened at work this morning.

Friend 1: Oh, do tell.

Friend 2: Well, first thing in the morning, my boss asked to speak to me after lunch. I was sweating bullets thinking if I was in trouble, or if I messed something up. But when I finally spoke to him, he actually wanted to complement the presentation I gave last week.

Friend 1: That must have been a relief.

Friend 2: Yep. Turns out I was worried over nothing.

Andrew: Kassy, I've had this situation happened to me before, have you?

Kassy: You know, I've honestly never had this happen to me. Thank goodness.

Andrew: Thank goodness.

Kassy: **Knock on wood**, it might happen in the future.

Andrew: I love that, knock on wood. Knock on wood is something that we say so that we don't give ourselves some bad luck, right? We don't want to jinx ourselves, don't want to give ourselves some bad luck. So, we say the expression knock on wood. But anyways, Kassy, could you kind of break down that example that we just heard and explain it to us all?

Kassy: Yeah. So, in this example conversation, we have two friends and the one wants to explain about her crazy day. When she got to the office in the morning, her boss asks to speak to her, and she starts sweating bullets worrying about whether she's in trouble. If she messed up on something. Maybe she was gonna get fired, she doesn't know. And when she finally speaks to her boss, he tells her that he is proud of her on how good she did on her presentation. She had nothing to worry about. She sweat bullets for nothing.

Andrew: We're going to wrap up here in just a moment, everyone but I do want to add one thing before we finish. And that is, that we can also use this expression sweating bullets to talk about the physical act of sweating too. So, we can use it in a metaphorical way to talk about being very anxious or nervous or stressed out, but we can use it in a literal way to talk about actually sweating. So, if it's a really hot day out, you could be like, "Oh, man, it's so hot. I'm sweating bullets right now." And that's talking about actually sweating a lot. So, just be careful. It's good to know that this expression does have two different meanings and it's really going to depend on the context to determine which one the speaker is using, right? If they're talking about playing sports or being hot or something like that then it's probably the actual physical act of sweating. But if it's more like being

stressed or nervous, that kind of situation then they're probably using it in a more metaphorical way.

Kassy: Well, that brings us to the end of the episode. To do a quick recap, we learned two expressions today, no sweat, which is something you say when someone thanks you for helping them and sweat bullets, which means to be worried or stressed out about something, or to be really, really hot. So, thanks for listening, everyone, we hope you learned a lot with us today and were able to improve your vocabulary.

Andrew: Our website is Culips.com. And if you want to get the study guide, including the transcript and practice exercises for this episode, just check out the website to download it.

Kassy: Becoming a Culips member is a great way to support us, but it's not the only way. You can also support us by leaving us a five-star rating and a nice review on your podcast app, telling your friends about Culips and following us on social media.

Andrew: If you have a question or comment about this episode, please leave it on the Culips.com page for this episode. We have a brand-new comment feature on our website, and we hope to see your questions and comments there. So, that's it for now but we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you all then. Goodbye.

Kassy: See ya.

Detailed Explanations

No sweat Idiom

The first expression from this episode is **no sweat**. **No sweat** is a phrase you can use when saying something is not a problem. For example, if someone asks you for an easy favour from you, you can say **no sweat** to show it's not a problem for you to help out.

No sweat can also mean something is easy. For example, if someone asks you about a test you took that was not at all difficult for you, you can say it was **no sweat**.

Another thing you could say is **don't sweat it** when you want someone to not worry about something. Or if something is very easy to do, you could say **I didn't even break a sweat**, to communicate that the task was extremely easy to finish.

Here are a couple more examples with **no sweat**:

Paul: I heard you helped George move into his new house last weekend. How did it go?

Lisa: It was **no sweat**, actually.

Paul: Really? He always has a lot of junk around his house.

Lisa: Fortunately, he cleaned everything up before we got there. So, the move was pretty easy.

Brianna: Hey! Here's a little gift for you for helping me out.

Norm: What? You don't need to do that.

Brianna: It's my pleasure. It was really cool of you to help me last week.

Norm: **No sweat**. Any time.

A twist on [something]

Phrase

In this episode, Kassy tells us that *don't sweat it* is **a twist on the expression** *no sweat*. **A twist on [something]** is a variation of it.

For example, imagine you are following a recipe for lasagna, but you decide to put your own special **twist on it** by adding ingredients that are not in the recipe. Your lasagna will not be exactly the same as the recipe version but will be a variation of the original.

You can also put **a twist on [something]** when talking about language. Putting **a twist on an expression**, for example, is making that expression more your style. Poets, writers, and other creative people do this all the time when expressing themselves.

Here are a couple more examples with **a twist on [something]**:

Karl: Did you see that new *West Side Story* movie?

Mona: Yeah. It's great.

Karl: I know. I loved it too. It's so original.

Mona: Original? Don't you know *West Side Story* is just **a twist on *Romeo and Juliet***? How can you call that original?

Karl: There's no dancing in *Romeo and Juliet*!

Mona: Fine.

Frank: Wow! That song is amazing.

Carlo: Thanks.

Frank: Did you write it yourself? I'm sorry but it sounds kind of familiar.

Carlo: Actually, it's **a twist on Beethoven's 5th symphony**, but I made it my own.

Frank: OK. Yes, now I can hear it.

To veg out

Phrasal verb, informal

In the first example conversation, a woman says her new couch is perfect for **vegging out**. **To veg out** means to relax and do almost nothing. If you have been sitting on your couch and watching TV for 5 hours without moving, you have been **vegging out**.

The expression **to veg out** comes from a person being like a vegetable. A vegetable doesn't move or do exercise. A person acting like that is **vegging out**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to veg out**:

Megan: Did you hike that mountain on the weekend like you said you would?

Pat: Oh, that. Umm... no.

Megan: No? Why not?

Pat: I was being lazy.

Megan: So what did you do all weekend?

Pat: I literally **vegged out** the entire time. I went from the couch to the fridge to the bathroom to my bed. That's it.

Britt: I heard you're going to Bali next month. I love Bali!

Dana: Yeah, it's pretty nice.

Britt: Are you going to go surfing? Maybe sightseeing in the north of the island?

Dana: No. We're just going **to veg out** in the hotel. Nothing more than that.

Britt: Really? That seems like a waste.

Dana: Not for us. We just want to relax and do nothing.

On [one's] last legs Idiom

In the second example dialogue, two coworkers talk about dying plants. They say the plants look like they're **on their last leg**. **To be on [one's] last legs** is to be close to dying or to failure. For example, a relationship can be **on its last legs** when it is close to ending.

Think of an exhausted animal that is too tired to stand. It will soon collapse. The last bit of energy the animal has is in its legs. However, when that energy is gone and the animal collapses, it will be close to death.

In that sense, the same can be said about something that is too tired or too worn out to continue, like a marathon runner who doesn't have enough energy to finish a race or a company that is losing too much money to stay in business.

You can say either **on [one's] last leg** or **on [one's] last legs**, both have the same meaning, although **last legs** is used more commonly by English speakers. Here are a couple more examples with **on [one's] last legs**:

Lou: I'm thinking of selling my stock in the company I'm working for. You might want to do the same.

Quinn: Oh? I thought your company was doing well.

Lou: I thought so too. But lately, the mood in the office and the messages we've been getting from headquarters are not encouraging.

Quinn: That sounds bad.

Lou: Yeah. Actually, I'm looking for a new job. I think the company is **on its last legs**.

Luke: Why are you looking at new refrigerators online?

Hanna: Ours is **on its last legs**. I'm doing my research before it dies on us.

Luke: That's a good idea.

Hanna: How's the one at your place? Is it dependable?

Sweating bullets

Idiom

The second key expression in this episode is **sweating bullets**. **Sweating bullets** describes a situation when you are really stressed out. You can say you are **sweating bullets** any time when you are feeling the pressure of a stressful situation.

Sweating bullets is an exaggeration. It is as if you are sweating so much that the sweat coming out of you is the same size and speed as bullets from a gun. In reality, even in extremely stressful situations, it is impossible for someone to sweat this much.

You can also say **sweating bullets** when someone is sweating a lot for reasons other than stress, such as physical activity or being very hot.

Here are a couple more examples with **sweating bullets**:

Jake: How did your sales meeting go today?

Misha: It was stressful! Nobody in the room looked like they wanted to buy what we were selling.

Jake: Oh no! That's the worst.

Misha: I know. I was **sweating bullets**. But finally, my team and I kept our calm, and we gave a great presentation. I think we got the contract!

Beth: I didn't catch the hockey game last night. How was it?

Chuck: It was insane! It went into double-overtime.

Beth: Seriously?

Chuck: I was so tense. I was **sweating bullets**.

Beth: And who won?

Chuck: We won! I had to take a shower after watching the game. It was crazy!

Knock on wood

Idiom

In the last example conversation from this episode, someone is put in a stressful situation at work. When responding to this, Kassy says that she has thankfully never been in that situation, and then she says **knock on wood**.

Knock on wood is something people say to avoid bad luck. In other words, it is said so that you can keep the good luck you currently have.

Saying **knock on wood** is a superstition often accompanied with actually knocking on real wood. For example, if you mention that you have good health, you can say **knock on wood**, and actually knock on something that is made of wood, in the hopes that your health continues to be good.

A common British variation is to say **touch wood**.

Here are a couple more examples with **knock on wood**:

Winnie: How is your son doing after his leg injury?

Steve: Thanks for asking. He's doing better now.

Winnie: It sounds like the injury wasn't as bad as we first thought.

Steve: That's right. He's making a remarkable recovery.

Winnie: Do you know when he'll be able to play basketball again?

Steve: The doctors say he might start training again in the next two weeks. **Knock on wood.**

Caleb: Are you still planning to go to Europe with us this summer?

Jen: So far so good. My husband and I are both excited about it.

Caleb: Do you think you can get time off from work?

Jen: I asked my boss and she said yes. So, **knock on wood**, nothing changes between now and then.

Quiz

1. What does it mean when someone says no sweat?

- a) there's a big problem
- b) it's not that hot
- c) there's no problem
- d) the weather is good

2. What are you doing if you are putting a twist on something?

- a) you are changing it slightly to make it your own
- b) you are stealing an idea from someone else

3. What does it mean if something is on its last legs?

- a) it is doing fine
- b) it will last forever
- c) it will stop working soon
- d) it has no legs

4. True or false? A very active person is often vegging out.

- a) true
- b) false

5. Why would you say knock on wood?

- a) you want to hit something
- b) you like wood
- c) you like knocking on things
- d) you want your good fortune to continue

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. When was the last time you were so stressed that you were sweating bullets?
2. Many people knock on wood in the hopes that their good luck continues. Do you have rituals to encourage good luck in your life?
3. What do you do when you notice an appliance or vehicle is on its last legs? Do you repair it or replace it before it dies on you?
4. Are you the type of person who likes to put a twist on recipes? What kind of dish do you like to make your own?
5. When is a time during your week when you like to veg out?

Quiz Answers

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

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