

Catch Word #126 – You eat like a bird

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here with another Culips English Learning Podcast.

Maura: Don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, because at our website, you'll find all of our past episodes. You can also become a member. And when you're a member, you have access to transcripts for all of our episodes, more detailed explanations of the expressions we use in our episodes, and quizzes to test your comprehension at the end.

Harp: And we're also on Facebook, so come on over and say hi.

Maura: Yeah. We love to hear from you, because it's so nice to have contact with the people who are listening and we hear from people all over the world.

Harp: Yeah. It's very exciting. And if you have a question, leave us a question.

Maura: Yeah. So, today we are going to do a Catch Word episode, and that is where we talk about different expressions and we give you explanations and examples of how you can use them.

Harp: And today all our expressions are about eating.

Maura: Mmhmm. Which is something that people do a lot of.

Harp: I love to eat.

Maura: So today we're gonna look at expressions that have to do with how much people are eating.

Harp: So our first expression today is **to eat like a bird**.

Maura: **To eat like a bird**. Now, you can already maybe start to imagine what this would mean. When I think of a bird, it's such a little creature, normally, and eats little worms or insects or grass or whatever people have left behind. But they're usually just **nibbling** and taking small bites, right?

Harp: Exactly. So **to eat like a bird** is when someone eats only a small amount of food, when they just kind of **nibble** at their food. They don't eat a lot.

- Maura: Right. So a person who **eats like a bird** might take a smaller portion or a smaller size than everyone else. Or it also could be that when they're eating, they only take very small, little bites and maybe at the end, they don't even eat everything on their plate.
- Harp: Yep, exactly. That's what this expression means.
- Maura: Now, we talked about how, when we imagine birds, we think they must not eat very much, because we just see them eating little bits here and there, but is that actually right?
- Harp: No. **See**, this expression comes from the first half of the 1900s, and back then we thought birds didn't eat that much. But in reality, birds eat quite a bit for how small they are.
- Maura: Right. So relative to their size, birds actually eat a lot. So this expression technically doesn't make sense.
- Harp: Exactly. But we still use it. **To eat like a bird** means that someone eats only a small amount or they just **nibble** a little bit or they don't eat everything on their plate.
- Maura: Right. So let's give a couple of examples with **to eat like a bird**.
- Harp: OK.

- Harp: What did you think of Brad's new girlfriend?
- Maura: Oh, I thought she was really nice, really friendly.
- Harp: Yeah. I thought so too. She's very outgoing.
- Maura: Yeah.
- Harp: Did you see how much she ate though?
- Maura: She **eats like a bird**.
- Harp: I know. She didn't eat anything. She was just eating little **nibbles**.
- Maura: I know. I wonder if she just wasn't hungry or if she always eats like that.
- Harp: Hopefully she liked the food that I cooked.
- Maura: Well, I thought it was good.
- Harp: Well, maybe next time she'll eat more.

Maura: Maybe.

Maura: So there is an example where two people were talking about the eating habits of another person.

Harp: Exactly. And this girlfriend, Brad's new girlfriend, didn't eat that much. **She ate like a bird.**

Maura: So, this is important, because if you don't know someone very well, it's not very polite to comment on their eating habits. So you shouldn't tell someone that they **eat like a bird** unless they're a very close friend or a family member.

Harp: Yes, definitely. It could be taken in a very rude way if you say it to someone you don't know.

Maura: You know, that's one thing I don't really like. I find especially females are very critical of other girls and how they're eating.

Harp: Mmhmm. I agree.

Maura: Yup. So this example, although it's not very nice, it is actually quite common that two people would talk about how someone else was eating.

Harp: Yup, definitely.

Maura: OK. Let's give an example now where this expression is used with family or friends and it's a comfortable situation.

Harp: OK.

Harp: Are you OK? Do you not like the food here?

Maura: No, no. The food's great. It's just that I'm really nervous because I have an interview in two days.

Harp: Oh, OK. I was thinking you're **eating like a bird.**

Maura: Yeah. I'm just stressed about my interview and when I'm stressed, I can't eat. That's it.

Harp: OK. Well I'm sure it's gonna go OK. You should eat some more.

Maura: Yeah. If I can't finish it, I'll just **take it to go.**

Harp: Good idea.

- Maura: In this case, there were two friends out to dinner and one person was not eating very much so the other person said, "You're **eating like a bird.**"
- Harp: Exactly, and she meant that her friend wasn't eating that much.
- Maura: Right. So, in some cases, one person could tell another that they're **eating like a bird** and it wouldn't matter.
- Harp: Exactly. In this situation, it was two close friends and you can say that to a close friend.
- Maura: All right. Now that we've talked about not eating very much, let's look at some expressions that have to do with eating a whole bunch of food.
- Harp: This is much more like me.
- Maura: The next expression is **to eat like a horse.**
- Harp: Yes. **To eat like a horse.**
- Maura: And this makes sense because a horse is a pretty big animal, so we can imagine that it must need to eat a lot because it's so big.
- Harp: Yup. And it seems like horses are just eating all the time.
- Maura: That's true. You always see their mouths moving and chewing and chomping.
- Harp: Yeah. So when you say someone eats like a horse, that means that they eat a lot.
- Maura: And this expression is quite an old expression, from the 1700s, which makes sense because back then, horses were even a bigger part of everyone's daily lives.
- Harp: Yup. There were the horse-drawn carriages.
- Maura: And there were a lot more farms at that time, too.
- Harp: Exactly. So this expression is an older expression.
- Maura: And in this case I think we got it right. Horses actually do eat a lot. There's no mix-up here. A horse eats a lot. So the expression **to eat like a horse** means that a person is eating a lot.
- Harp: Exactly.

- Maura: This is also an expression that you should only use with close family and friends because you might insult someone if you tell them that they're eating a lot.
- Harp: Exactly. It's not a very polite thing to say with people you don't know that well.
- Maura: No. People might say it about themselves or friends or family, but that's about it.
- Harp: Should we give an example?
- Maura: All right. Let's do it.

- Harp: What are you doing tonight?
- Maura: Well, I have to go grocery shopping.
- Harp: Again? **Didn't you just go a couple of days ago?**
- Maura: I know. It wasn't very long ago. But my son eats like a horse, so I have to go back and buy more food already.
- Harp: Well, he is a growing teenager, so I understand that.
- Maura: Right. So teenagers always eat a lot, he's **going through a phase**.
- Harp: All right. Well, have fun grocery shopping.
- Maura: Yeah, thanks.

- Maura: In this example, the expression **to eat like a horse** was used to describe a teenage boy who was eating a lot all the time.
- Harp: Which I think is very true.
- Maura: It is very true, especially for boys. When they start to become 12, 13, 14 years old, they eat a lot.
- Harp: Yeah. I even remember being that age and eating a lot.
- Maura: Yup. Me too, actually. Maybe it's not just guys.
- Harp: I think it's because you're growing so much.
- Maura: Yup. All right let's give another example with this expression.
- Harp: Let's do it.

Maura:	Do you wanna go grab a bite to eat?
Harp:	Well, what time did you wanna eat lunch at?
Maura:	I was going to wait until about 1:00.
Harp:	Oh no, I cannot wait that long. You know, I went to the gym today, and when I go to the gym, I can eat like a horse.
Maura:	Well, we can go earlier too, no problem.
Harp:	How about now?
Maura:	All right. Let's go now.
Harp:	OK.

Maura: There's an example where a person is hungry and wants to eat a lot because she went to the gym. So we can say that she eats like a horse after she's been to the gym.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: And I think this makes sense. After you do a lot of physical activity, you often **build up an appetite** and wanna eat a lot.

Harp: Yes. That definitely happens to me.

Maura: Me too.

Harp: All right. Let's move on to our last expression

Maura: All right. The last expression is also about eating a lot, or I should say, thinking that you can eat a lot.

Harp: Yes. Our last expression is **my eyes are bigger than my stomach**.

Maura: Right. So someone could say, "**My eyes are bigger than my stomach**." This means that a person thinks they're really hungry and so orders or prepares or takes a lot of food and then they realize that they actually can't eat it all.

Harp: Yeah. They think they're really, really hungry and they're gonna eat so much, but really they don't end up eating that much in the end.

- Maura: Right. And this expression is really just showing that difference. **My eyes**, so what I see in front of me and I think that I can eat, is really not what I can actually eat. The expression doesn't make logical sense. Your eyes are not actually bigger than your stomach, but it means that you think you can eat more than you actually can.
- Harp: Yes, exactly. You know, I actually came up with the idea for this episode because I always do this. For me, **my eyes are always bigger than my stomach**, and I order too much food and then I can't eat it, especially at breakfast.
- Maura: Well, when you're really hungry or you're at a really delicious restaurant, it makes sense that you get excited and you wanna order a lot of food, but sometimes it's too much.
- Harp: Yeah. One time I went to a restaurant for breakfast and I ordered a lot of food and when the waiter brought it to me he said, "Don't worry. There's more food in the kitchen if you want." It was a bit mean, but I thought it was funny.
- Maura: And did you **finish your plate**?
- Harp: Not at all. **My eyes were bigger than my stomach**.
- Maura: So that's something interesting to point out. You said, "**My eyes were bigger than my stomach**." This expression is usually used in the past because people notice after they've taken the food that they're too full to finish it all.
- Harp: Yeah. And it often happens at **a buffet**, where you can take as much food as you want and then at the end, you realize that you couldn't have eaten it all.
- Maura: All right. So let's give you an example in the past tense using **my eyes were bigger than my stomach**.
- Harp: OK.

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| Harp: | Your lunch looks delicious. What is it? |
| Maura: | Well, it's pad thai. I ordered it last night at the restaurant. |
| Harp: | Oh, I love leftovers . |
| Maura: | Yeah. I also ordered a soup to start and some spring rolls and some dumplings. |
| Harp: | Wow, you were hungry. |

Maura:	Yup. My eyes were bigger than my stomach.
Harp:	Definitely. But at least you have lunch for today.
Maura:	Yes. I get to eat a delicious lunch now, so it's not so bad.
Harp:	Yeah.

Maura: There's an example where a person had **eyes bigger than her stomach**. She was at a restaurant and ordered too much food. And in this case, it wasn't so bad, because she just had a nice lunch of **leftovers**.

Harp: Yes. I love **leftovers**.

Maura: Me too. I actually plan ahead just so I can have them.

Harp: Me too. All right, let's do a quick recap for the expressions we talked about today.

Maura: The first expression we looked at was **to eat like a bird**, which means to eat a small amount of food or **to nibble** on food.

Harp: Yes. And the second expression was **to eat like a horse**, which means that you eat a lot of food.

Maura: Right. And **to have eyes bigger than your stomach** means that you take a lot of food because you're really hungry but in the end you can't eat it all because you're too full.

Harp: Exactly. And remember everyone, check out the website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and become a member, help support us and it will really help you learn English.

Maura: And if you're on Facebook, come say hi. If you're on Twitter, Harp and I are still learning how to use Twitter, so if you say hi, hopefully we'll respond back.

Harp: We will. It just might take us a little bit of time.

Maura: We're better on Facebook.

Harp: Yeah. Go to Facebook.

Maura: All right. We will talk to you again soon. Bye!

Harp: Bye everyone!

Detailed Explanation

To eat like a bird

To eat like a bird means to eat the same way a bird does. Birds eat very little at one time, and they peck at their food, taking little nibbles instead of huge bites. When a person eats very little or takes tiny bites, we can say that they **eat like a bird**.

In this episode, Maura and Harp use this expression in an example about someone's new girlfriend and her eating habits. As Maura and Harp say, it's not really nice to talk about someone's eating habits if you don't know them very well. Sometimes it is okay to talk about the eating habits of a friend or family member, as long as it is not going to hurt their feelings.

Here is an example with **to eat like a bird** used in a conversation:

Hannah: How is the organizing going for your dinner party?

Rachel: OK. I just want to make sure I'm making enough food for everybody.

Hannah: I think you'll be OK. Everyone you've invited **eats like a bird**.

Rachel: Wait until they try my lasagna! They'll be having seconds, I'm sure!

To nibble

To nibble means to take tiny bites of food as opposed to taking big bites. **To nibble** can be used literally for when someone takes small bites, but sometimes **to nibble** is used more generally to describe snacking, light eating, or just tasting something. This is an expression used when you are just having a tiny bit of something, or when you are taking very small bites of food.

In this episode, Maura and Harp use the verb **to nibble** to describe what it means to eat like a bird, because people who eat like a bird eat very little food or take very small bites of their food.

Here is an example with **to nibble**:

Mike: This pie is so good. Do you want to try some?

Laura: Maybe just a **nibble**. I'm not very hungry but I would like to know what it tastes like.

Mike: OK. I'm full so I'll leave you the rest **to nibble** on.

To take food to go

To take food to go can mean a couple of different things. As we learned in a previous Culips episode, called *Who Wants to Eat Out Tonight?*, **taking food to go** can mean purchasing food in a restaurant with the intention of eating it somewhere else. The restaurant where you purchase the food may not even have tables and may only serve **food to go**, or it may be a choice they give to customers who don't want to sit at a table and eat. The food you purchase is often casually called take-out food. There are many variations of the expression **take out**, and they all can be used to describe both the action of taking the food out, and the food that you get to take out.

In this episode, Maura uses the expression **to take food to go** to mean wrapping up or packaging leftover food to take with you and eat later. In both cases, the expression **to take food to go** means to take food from the place that it is cooked and bring it somewhere else to eat it.

Here is an example with **to take food to go**:

Waiter: Would you like to order dessert?

Wendy: I'm so full after that dinner! I don't think I could have more than one bite of anything.

Waiter: Well, you could have a nibble and then I could wrap it up for you.

Wendy: Hmm. Whenever I **take food to go**, I never end up eating it. I think I'll skip dessert tonight.

A buffet

A buffet is a way to serve food that involves the food being placed in one common area and the diners getting up to serve themselves. **A buffet** table is usually a long table, or several long tables, and usually there are a lot of different food choices placed on the tables. People go up to the tables with their own plates and get whatever they'd like from **the buffet**.

Buffet is an English word that comes from a French word that describes the type of table that **a buffet** is usually served on. There are a lot of English words that come from other language's words. Because **buffet** is French in origin, the way it is pronounced is also very French. Since **buffet** has the letters *et* at the end, you would assume that it would be pronounced *buff-ett*, but because it is French, it is actually pronounced *buff-ay*. There are many English words that come from French words and are pronounced in a French way.

Here are a few more examples:

- *Bouquet*: an arrangement of flowers, pronounced *boo-kay*
- *Ballet*: a type of dance, pronounced *bah-lay*
- *Faux*: fake or false, pronounced *fo*.

To see

The literal definition of the verb **to see** is to view something with your eyes. In this episode, Harp uses the word **see** before she explains something to Maura. When used this way, **see** (or **you see**) signals the beginning of an explanation. **See** or **you see** used in front of a definition or explanation means, "I will explain" or "This will help you understand." When someone says **I see** after an explanation or definition, it means I understand.

Here is an example with **see** and **you see**:

Jane: I still don't understand why *buffet* is pronounced *buff-ay*

David: Because it came from a French word. **You see**, in the French language, anything that ends in *et* is pronounced as an *ay* sound instead of an *ett* sound.

Jane: Ah, **I see** now. Thanks David.

Didn't you just go a couple of days ago?

In this episode, Maura and Harp explain the expression *to eat like a horse* using an example. Maura says that she has to go grocery shopping, and Harp asks her, "**Didn't you just go a couple of days ago?**" In English, a question like this that involves a negative word, like *didn't*, *wasn't*, or *couldn't*, is only used when you are checking information you already think is true. In this case, Harp thinks Maura went grocery shopping a couple of days ago and by asking this question, she's checking that information.

Here is an example with several negative questions being used to check the truthfulness of information:

Tom: I'm running a marathon this weekend.

Tania: **Didn't you just run one last weekend?**

Tom: Yes, I did. But that one was for a different charity.

Tania: **Isn't that much running hard on your body?**

Tom: It is, but as long as you get lots of rest in between it's okay. Hey, **weren't you going to run a marathon too?**

Tania: Yes. It's a month from now.

To go through a phase

To go through a phase means to go through a time in your life when you do something but then you stop doing it after a while. **A phase** is a stage or a process that involves some sort of change. When someone talks about a person **going through a phase**, they mean that the person goes through a temporary change in their life. This expression is often used when speaking about a stage that people go through in life that they outgrow or stop doing when they get older.

In this episode, Maura uses the expression **to go through a phase** when she and Harp are giving an example of the phrase *to eat like a horse*. Maura uses the example of someone having to buy a lot of food for their teenage son, and says that he is **going through a phase** to explain why he is eating so much. In this case, Maura means that the son is going through a temporary time in his life when he is eating a lot because he is growing up quickly and his body needs more food while it grows.

Here is another example with **to go through a phase**:

Tim: What kind of movies do you like?

Samantha: Mainly comedies, but I also like horror movies, especially around Halloween!

Tim: **I went through a phase** when I watched a lot of horrors too, but now I'm terrified of them for some reason!

To grab a bite

In a previous Culips podcast episode, called *Who Wants to Eat Out Tonight?*, we learned what the expression *to eat out* means. We also learned that another way to say *to eat out* is **to grab a bite**. **To grab a bite** means the same as to eat out, or to eat at a restaurant or a fast food diner. It means to eat out of your house, or away from your house.

In this episode, Harp and Maura give an example of the expression *to eat like a horse*, and Maura asks Harp whether she wants **to grab a bite** to eat. What Maura means is that she is wondering if Harp would like to go out and eat at a place that serves food, like a restaurant or a diner.

Here is another example with the expression **to grab a bite**:

Paul: I'm starving. Is there anything good in the fridge?

Ted: There's only pasta sauce. I can cook some pasta if you want.

Paul: Nah, let's go out and **grab a bite** instead.

To build up an appetite

To build up an appetite means to become hungry by doing something physical like exercising. **To build up an appetite** means to start having hunger pangs or stomach growling after you've done something physical. If you just become hungry because it's lunch time, you wouldn't say you've **built up an appetite**.

Here is an example with **to build up an appetite**:

Sam: Okay, the table is almost done! Now we just have to build the chairs and our dining set will be finished!

Carl: Could we eat lunch first? I've really **built up an appetite** working on this project!

Carl: Sure! It was a lot of work building that table. Let's go get something to eat.

My eyes are bigger than my stomach

My eyes are bigger than my stomach is a common expression that means that what you think you can eat is more than you can actually eat. The reason the expression is **your eyes are bigger** is because it suggests that what you think is an appropriate amount of food, or what you see with your eyes as an amount of food that you can fit in your stomach, is more than you can actually fit in your stomach. So, your eyes (or what your eyes see and judge as appropriate) are not really accurate. So, it doesn't mean your eyes are actually bigger than your stomach. It means that what your eyes see as an appropriate amount of food is actually more than your stomach can fit.

This expression is often used in the past tense, as in **my eyes were bigger than my stomach**, because the realization that you cannot eat as much as you thought happens after you are done eating.

Here is an example with **my eyes are bigger than my stomach**:

David: Wow, this dinner is so good!

Suzanne: Do you wanna finish mine? I'm full.

David: But you ordered a large! You should've ordered a smaller plate.

Suzanne: I know. **My eyes were bigger than my stomach**.

To finish your plate

To finish your plate means to eat all the food on the plate you're eating from. Sometimes this expression is used by parents when they want their kids to eat all of their food. For example, a parent might say, "You have **to finish your plate** before you can have any dessert."

In this episode, Harp tells a story about going to a restaurant and ordering a lot of food. Maura asks Harp whether she **finished her plate**, and Harp says no. Harp did not eat all the food that was served to her.

Here is another example with **to finish your plate**:

Fran: I'm so hungry! Could I have another piece of bread?

Greg: You should **finish your plate** first. If you're still hungry after that, then you can have more bread.

Leftovers

Leftovers are food that's left over from one meal, and you eat it for another meal. If you have extra food left over at dinner that nobody eats, you can put it away and eat it for another meal. This extra food is called **leftovers**.

Usually, the word **leftovers** is plural, even if the extra food is only one of something. For example, if there were an extra hamburger left over from your dinner last night and you wanted to eat it for lunch, you could say that you are having **leftovers** for lunch even though there is only one hamburger.

In this episode, Harp says she loves **leftovers** after Maura tells her that her pad thai lunch is from a restaurant because she couldn't finish what she ordered. Because Maura's lunch is extra food that she couldn't eat at a previous meal, it's called **leftovers**.

Here is another example with **leftovers**:

Bill: Hey do you want to go out for lunch today? There's a group of us going to that new restaurant across the street.

Sally: I went there last night, actually! The food is really good. I ordered more than I could eat though, so I have **leftovers** from there today.

Quiz

1. What does *to eat like a horse* mean?

- a) to only eat vegetables and not meat
- b) to eat a lot of food
- c) to chew with your mouth open
- d) to only eat at restaurants and never cook at home

2. What does *to eat like a bird* mean?

- a) to eat a lot of food
- b) to eat very little food
- c) to eat food off the ground
- d) to eat a lot of seeds and nuts

3. What does *to take food to go* mean?

- a) to take food from the place it was served to you and eat it somewhere else
- b) to eat while you are riding in a vehicle
- c) to eat free food
- d) to eat food that someone else makes for you

4. What does *to go through a phase* mean?

- a) to go to a take-out or drive-through restaurant
- b) to not be hungry
- c) to go through a temporary stage in your life
- d) to eat too much

5. What does it mean if someone says that their eyes were bigger than their stomach?

- a) They had a very small stomach and very big eyes.
- b) They ate with their eyes closed.
- c) They liked eating at buffets.
- d) They thought they could eat more than they actually could.

6. What is a buffet?

- a) a restaurant that only serves take-out
- b) a type of dance
- c) a method of serving where there is a common table with choices of food
- d) a restaurant that is only open for breakfast

7. What does *building up an appetite* mean?

- a) getting hungry because of physical activity
- b) going to a restaurant where you serve yourself
- c) eating too much food
- d) eating small bites of food

8. What are leftovers?

- a) food that someone else has that you want to eat
- b) another word for breakfast
- c) food that is served to you by friends
- d) food from another meal that you did not finish

Answers:

1.b 2.b 3.a 4.c 5.d 6.c 7.a 8.d