

## Simplified Speech #140 – Kassy’s kombucha

### Episode description

Have you ever heard of kombucha? For some people, it’s an amazing tea full of health benefits. For others, it’s a weird-tasting beverage that only strange people drink! In this Simplified Speech episode, Andrew asks Kassy about her kombucha brewing lifestyle. They talk about the various steps of Kassy’s brewing process.

Simplified Speech is a series that features easy and natural conversation designed for listeners of all levels. In this episode, our hosts Andrew and Kassy talk about the fascinating world of kombucha brewing!

### Fun fact

Both through home brewing and commercial sales, kombucha has become a worldwide industry. The international kombucha industry is estimated to be worth \$1.7 billion US annually.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To keep regular
- Out of thin air
- Under the assumption
- Room temperature
- To pass out
- To grow sick of [something]



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## Transcript

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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.

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

**Kassy:** And I'm Kassy.

**Andrew:** And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello there, Culips listeners. Welcome back to another episode. You're listening to Simplified Speech, which is the Culips series that features clear, natural, and easy to understand English conversations about interesting topics. And today, I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hello there, Kassy.

**Kassy:** Hey, Andrew, and hello, everyone. So, Andrew, I've got a question for you. Do you know what kombucha is?

**Andrew:** Kombucha. Kombucha. I think so. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's a kind of tea that's been fermented, is that right?

**Kassy:** Yeah, that's right.

**Andrew:** OK, so kombucha is a fermented tea. But, Kassy, why are you asking me this question?

**Kassy:** Well, one of my new hobbies these days is brewing my own kombucha, and I thought we could talk about it in this episode.

**Andrew:** Oh, OK, cool. Well, that sounds like a great idea. And I'd love to hear all about that, as I'm sure our listeners would as well.

**Kassy:** Great. We can talk about that in a moment, but before we do, let's let everyone know about our study guide and transcript for this episode.

**Andrew:** Good idea. So, everyone, the study guide for this episode includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations and examples, a quiz, and more. And you can download it in a PDF file and print it off if you're kind of old school like that and you like to have the physical paper, or you can view a mobile-friendly version that looks great on smartphones and tablets and computers. And to access the study guide, all you need to do is visit our website, [Culips.com](http://Culips.com), and become a Culips member.

We also wanted to give a shout-out to one of our listeners, who comes from the far east of Russia, Kassy, and her name is Alina. And Alina left us a wonderful review on Apple Podcasts.

**Kassy:** Yes, Alina wrote, “Hello, Culips team. I absolutely love your podcast. I honestly think it’s the best one ever made and so I keep telling everyone all about it. I’ve been listening to you for over 2 years and look forward to each and every new episode. When I see the notification on my phone, I literally jump up with excitement. You give me so much help and it’s always a pleasure to listen to your lovely voices. Please keep it up. Wishing you the best of luck and more listeners. Thanks a million.” Wow, amazing review.

**Andrew:** Yeah, Alina, thanks so much. And thanks to all of our listeners who support Culips by leaving us a review on their favourite podcast provider. We really, really do appreciate your support.

OK, Kassy. So now that all of the announcements are out of the way, we can turn our attention to the weird and the wacky and the wonderful world of kombucha. And I guess the first question that I have for you is why? Why did you start brewing kombucha tea?

**Kassy:** There were two main reasons. The first one was I have a lot more free time on my hands these days, and I wanted a new hobby. And I thought it would be a cool experiment. Kombucha, you know, it has a process that you need to fulfill. And if you don’t fulfill every step of that process, it won’t work. You’ll get a really bad batch and you’ll have to start over from the beginning.

**Andrew:** OK.

**Kassy:** And one more reason I picked it, before we dive deep into the process of making kombucha, was I wanted to make something that was full of probiotics. I’ve heard that they’re really good for you. And I hate taking vitamins every day. So I thought this would be a good alternative.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that’s a good idea, kind of killing two birds with one stone, right? Like gaining a new hobby and at the same time not having to take vitamins and making something that’s healthy for you. I like that.

So, yeah, why don’t we dive in to the process of how to make it because it is a little bit complicated. And for people who are not familiar with kombucha, it’s not like you’re brewing a hot cup of tea, right? It’s completely different than that. You know, the traditional tea that we think of, maybe just green tea, or black tea, or a tea bag. I think it’s quite, quite different than making that kind of tea. So could you break it down and explain the steps that you need to go through to make kombucha?

**Kassy:** Yeah, so kombucha is actually filled of a living organism, it's full of bacteria, but this bacteria is, quote, unquote, good bacteria. Your stomach is full of bacteria and that good bacteria helps you digest things in your stomach and, you know, keep you flowing well, I guess you could say.

**Andrew:** **Keep you regular**, right?

**Kassy:** Yes.

**Andrew:** And is that why we call them probiotics, Kassy, because those microbes are good for us?

**Kassy:** You know, I'm not quite sure, but I assume that is correct.

**Andrew:** Sounds good to me, at least.

**Kassy:** Yes. But because it's a living organism, you can't just start from scratch. You need something called the mother.

**Andrew:** The mother. OK, you're gonna have to break this one down, the mother. So what is the mother?

**Kassy:** The mother is, like, an already living, thriving batch of this bacteria. So you can't just grow this bacteria **out of thin air**. I mean, it's a living thing, right? You, like, we're not God, we can't make a living thing. So you have to get it from somewhere else.

**Andrew:** OK. So it's not as simple as just going to your cupboard and taking out some ingredients and mixing it together and then you have the kombucha tea. But instead, you need to start it with this mother, this living thing, and then brew the tea from that.

OK, so I imagine then that you would have to get the mother from maybe a friend that's making kombucha that has some of the mother that they could give to you? Or maybe you can buy it? I'm not sure, can you buy it? How did you get your mother?

**Kassy:** Yeah, so I didn't have any friends around here that I knew of, and maybe some people could go on Facebook or something and find somebody nearby, but I also didn't have that. So I went on to, like, just a website, kind of like Amazon in the US, and I just typed in kombucha, and they were selling some, like, little packets that have SCOBY. And SCOBY are these live cultures that you need to start making kombucha.

**Andrew:** OK, so SCOBY and mother, are these the same thing?

**Kassy:** Yes. So SCOBY is the liquid and if anybody's seen or heard of kombucha before, maybe what comes to mind is this kind of alien looking, squishy circle.

**Andrew:** Almost like a jellyfish, it looks like.

**Kassy:** Yes, that—when, before I started making kombucha I thought that was a SCOBY, but that is actually just the by-product of your kombucha-making process. It's not necessary.

**Andrew:** OK. I also was **under the assumption**, I thought, that that jellyfish-looking thing that you see in the jar of somebody making kombucha, I thought that was the SCOBY as well, but that's not it. OK, that is just the by-product of the living organism doing its thing in the jar while it's brewing.

**Kassy:** Yeah, exactly.

**Andrew:** Wow.

**Kassy:** I got my SCOBY. And there, after that, there's two steps, the first fermentation and the second fermentation.

**Andrew:** OK, Kassy, let's break that word down for our listeners as well, fermentation. What does that mean?

**Kassy:** Yeah, that is when your bacteria eat up the sugars in your liquid or whatever you're making and creates that product that is full of probiotics, the thing that you want.

**Andrew:** So a lot of foods that we eat are fermented, right? Like here in Korea, we eat a lot of kimchi, at least I eat it almost every day, pretty much every day, in fact. There are also some kinds of pickles, sauerkraut is fermented. Some alcohol is fermented. My favourite fermented food is sourdough bread, which, actually hearing you describe the process of making kombucha reminds me a little bit of how people make sourdough bread, as well. Because that needs to start from—they call it the starter, but it's almost pretty much exactly like the mother that you were describing earlier. So lots of foods that we can eat are fermented. And I love the taste of fermented food. It has that kind of sour flavour, just a little sour and it's really delicious, in my opinion.

**Kassy:** Yeah, I totally agree. In the first fermentation process, that is when you do the normal tea making. You take boiled water, you put in a bunch of tea bags, and you also put in sugar.

**Andrew:** OK, so water, tea bags, and sugar. Are you using hot water to brew the tea?

**Kassy:** Yeah, so you boil it, and then you steep the tea and dissolve the sugar inside the water. And then you have to let it sit until it's **room temperature** because if you try to dump your SCOBY into that mixture when it's still hot, you can fry your bacteria. They will die.

**Andrew:** They will boil alive.

**Kassy:** Yes.

**Andrew:** Oh, no. OK. So **room temperature**, that describes just, like, warm water, right? When it's not cold and not hot, it's just like that neutral, middle temperature. That's what we call **room temperature**.

And, Kassy, how big was the batch that you brewed? Are you making, like, just a small teapot or many, many litres?

**Kassy:** So my first time I only had about a cup and a half of starter SCOBY. So I could only make about a litre my first time. But now I'm in my second or third iteration and I make about 4 litres at a time.

**Andrew:** OK, so it's quite the brewhouse that you have going on in your apartment.

**Kassy:** Yeah, after you put the SCOBY in and the tea, you just stick that in a cupboard, a nice warm spot inside a jar, and you just let that sit for, like, a week, maybe 2 weeks, until it starts to get bubbly and that sugar is all eaten up by the bacteria and it starts to taste a little bit sour.

**Andrew:** OK. Now, I've had some friends that have done home brew before. And home brew is what we call making beer at home, home brew. And those friends actually had, they were living together, they were roommates. They had a huge accident because in one of the stages of the beer-making process, some, something, I don't know what it was exactly, but some liquid exploded because it got too bubbly. And I guess there was too much gas in the container. Do you have to worry about that when you're making kombucha as well?

**Kassy:** Yeah, you don't have to worry about that in the first fermentation, but after your liquid starts to get a little sour, it's ready for your second fermentation. And that is when you get the real bubble action. You take your kombucha that's ready and you stick it into bottles with, like, corkscrew top or, you know, something that can seal, and you also add flavours at this stage. So I've done orange Creamsicle flavour, strawberry, green grape flavour. Yeah, you could do any variety of flavours you want. And you have to let that sit for 3 days. And while that's happening, the sugars are being eaten again, and gas inside is building from carbon dioxide release. And now that your liquid is in a sealed bottle, that air inside has nowhere to go, so that's what causes that natural effervescence, that natural seltzer, kind of.

**Andrew:** Like a fizziness.

**Kassy:** Yeah, the fizziness, exactly. So if you're not careful, they can explode. This has happened to my sister before when she made kombucha.

**Andrew:** A kombucha bomb. Oh no. OK, so that's really interesting. You made many different flavours, orange Creamsicle. I think some of our listeners maybe don't know what a Creamsicle is. It's very delicious. Could you explain what a Creamsicle is?

**Kassy:** Yeah, originally a Creamsicle is an orange and vanilla ice cream bar. But in this case, I just took orange slices and vanilla extract and added it to my kombucha tea.

**Andrew:** OK. Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that. So how did you flavour, for the Creamsicle you added oranges and vanilla. What about for the grape? Did you put in actual grapes?

**Kassy:** Yes. And I put it in the really delicious, expensive Japanese Muscat grapes.

**Andrew:** Shine Muscat.

**Kassy:** Yes. Oh, they're so good.

**Andrew:** I don't know if these grapes are famous around the world, but here in Korea, they are very popular and very expensive. My wife bought some for our home and I almost **passed out** when she told me how much they cost because they were, like, \$30 for one bunch of grapes. But it was a special treat and they were very delicious.

Kassy, you put them in the kombucha, did the flavour turn out well? Was it delicious?

**Kassy:** It was probably my favourite flavour so far. I also made an apple cinnamon flavour where I chopped the apples into little pieces, put them in the jar, and mixed it with cinnamon. It was a really perfect flavour for fall.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that sounds like a perfect fall flavour. So I'm guessing then that all of your kombucha turned out well. There were no accidents or explosions or anything like that?

**Kassy:** Nope, I was really lucky. One of my flavours didn't get a lot of bubble, a lot of fizziness going on, but it still tasted delicious. So I'm going to call it a win.

**Andrew:** Nice. Now when you brew a big batch like that, like you said, you've done this two or three times, and you're making 4 litres at a time. Does it get tiresome to drink it at all? Or is it still fresh and delicious every time you drink some?

**Kassy:** So far, I haven't **grown sick of it**. And, actually, I drink it faster than it takes to ferment. So right now I'm actually out of kombucha and I'm just waiting for it to get fizzy.

**Andrew:** I think that would be the difficult part of the process for me is the waiting, like, especially between making it and that first fermentation where you have to wait for, like, 2 weeks. Do you check in on it often during that time to see if there's any bubbly action happening?

**Kassy:** Oh, my gosh, Andrew, I check it, like, religiously. The first 7 days, nothing really happens. But after that, I probably check it daily until it gets to the proper taste that I want.



**Andrew:** So now that you have the SCOBY and you have the mother, does that mean that you can use this to make kombucha in the future. Like, you can reuse it because it's still alive, right? It doesn't die after you make some tea. Is that correct?

**Kassy:** Every time I finished my first fermentation process, I put the kombucha into those sealed jars, but I always leave at least 2 or 3 cups in the bottom to start my next fermentation process. So it's all happening at the same time. When I put the ready kombucha into the sealed jars, then I already have my lukewarm brewed tea, ready to put back into my giant 4-litre jar to restart the first fermentation once again.

**Andrew:** So, the process is always in motion. It's always going.

**Kassy:** Exactly.

**Andrew:** Now what happens if you wanted to take a break for a little while? Would that mother die and would you have to replace it? The only reason I ask is because I actually talked with my mom the other day, and my mom said she was babysitting. And I said, "Oh, whose baby are you watching? That's weird. I didn't know that you had friends with babies." And she said, "Oh, I'm babysitting my friend's sourdough starter." I guess her friend went on vacation and she doesn't want her sourdough bread starter to die while she's on vacation. So my mom is looking at it every day and maybe adding some flour or water. I'm not sure. You have to do something to it to make sure that that bacteria doesn't die. Is making kombucha the same as that? If you want to take a break, do you have to maintain that mother for a while?

**Kassy:** Um, yeah, usually they call that the SCOBY. And you honestly don't have to do anything up to a certain amount of weeks, I think maybe 4 or 5 weeks is the maximum. By that point, your tea is going to go from being, like, a sweet, sour taste to, like, a super vinegary taste. So the bacteria is still fine, but you're gonna have to toss out most of that liquid and start again when you get back, because it won't be edible.

**Andrew:** I see. OK, very interesting. So, Kassy, we're gonna wrap things up here in just a moment, but I have one last question before we leave that I want to ask you and that is how do you like to drink the kombucha tea? Do you drink it on ice? Do you drink it in the morning? Or is it something that you drink in the evening? What's your preferred way of drinking kombucha?

**Kassy:** I really like it. So I usually drink about a cup in the morning and a cup in the evening after dinner.

**Andrew:** Nice. Very good. Well, please save me a bottle, OK? Next time we meet up, I want to try some of this Kassy kombucha.

**Kassy:** I can make that a brand.

**Andrew:** Yeah, maybe, who knows? But I would like to try it. So save me a bottle, OK?



**Kassy:** Will do, Andrew.

**Andrew:** All right. Well, listeners, that is going to bring us to the end of this episode. Thank you so much for listening. Just to recap what we talked about here today, we talked all about Kassy's kombucha and this wild adventure that she's on with her new hobby of brewing kombucha in her home. And we hope that you enjoyed this episode and were able to learn a lot with us.

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We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

**Kassy:** See ya.

## Detailed Explanations

### To keep regular

Phrasal verb

At the beginning of this episode, Kassy talks about the health benefits kombucha. She says it has a lot of good bacteria that keeps your digestive system flowing properly. Andrew adds that it **keeps you regular**. **To keep regular** is to regularly empty your bowels, as in to regularly go to the washroom. Having regular body cycles is seen as a healthy process in someone's life.

You can also say **to be regular**. This also applies to women's menstruation. In this sense, **to be regular** is to have your period at regular intervals without being too late or too early.

Here are a couple more examples with **to keep regular**:

**Maria:** I'm feeling bloated today.

**Olive:** I'm sorry to ask, but have you gone to the washroom yet?

**Maria:** Well, I tried, but I couldn't push anything out.

**Olive:** I noticed that you never eat fruit and you almost never eat vegetables. If you ate those more often, it would really help **to keep you regular**.

**Marcia:** Do you have a painkiller I can take? My cramps are really intense this month.

**Nancy:** Sure. Here you go.

**Marcia:** Thanks. I usually carry some on me when I know I'm going to have my period. But since I started my new job, my whole cycle **is not very regular** anymore.

**Nancy:** Is that because of stress?

**Marcia:** Probably. Stress and a new daily schedule. I'm sure it will get back on track soon.

## Out of thin air

Idiom

In this episode, Kassy explains how kombucha requires living bacteria to start the brewing process. That starter is called the mother. She says that you can't simply make kombucha **out of thin air**. **Out of thin air** means something is made out of nothing. In this sense, **out of thin air** is most often used in a negative sentence. For example, you can say that you can't come up with \$2,000 **out of thin air**. If you don't have that money, you can't make it suddenly exist.

Another common way of using this expression is to say **to appear out of thin air** or **to come out of thin air**. You can say this when someone or something suddenly appears without advanced warning. It is similar to saying something came **out of the blue**.

Here are a couple more examples with **out of thin air**:

**Pablo:** Who's your favourite soccer player?

**Benji:** I would say it's Messi. He's just so good.

**Pablo:** I know. I like him, too. What do you like the best about him?

**Benji:** It's his ball-handling skills. Sometimes he looks like he's in trouble, but then, **out of thin air**, he runs through two or three defenders. He's a magician.

**Astrid:** Nice engagement ring! Tell us how he proposed to you.

**Carmel:** It was sweet. It was at the train station. He told me that he couldn't pick me up that day, so I had no expectation to see him. Then he appeared **out of thin air** behind me, kneeling on one knee.

**Astrid:** That must have been a shock. How long did it take you to say yes?

**Carmel:** It took me a few minutes. I was crying too much!

## Under the assumption

### Phrase

While explaining the different steps in making kombucha, Kassy talks about an alien-looking, squishy circle. Before she started making kombucha, Kassy thought that this was the SCOBY (which stands for symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast). However, it isn't. Andrew thought the same thing. He expresses this by saying he was **under the assumption** that the two were the same.

**Under the assumption** is a common way of explaining that you had preconceived notions on some topic. An assumption is something you assume. To assume is to think something is true without proof and without being fully certain. In this case, Andrew didn't know for certain the difference between the weird circle and the SCOBY. He simply thought he knew.

Here are a couple more examples with **under the assumption**:

**Monica:** Are you driving Charlie to football practice tomorrow?

**Patrick:** Tomorrow? No. Why?

**Monica:** I was **under the assumption** that you were driving him tomorrow and I was taking him on the weekend. Is that not correct?

**Patrick:** I don't recall saying that, but I can do it that way if you like. No problem.

**Pete:** Is there a problem with our arrangement?

**Chuck:** Yes, there is. When I agreed to allow you to use part of my driveway, I was **under the assumption** that you were going to pay \$50 a month. That's what you told me.

**Pete:** We didn't sign a contract or anything. I don't owe you that money.

**Chuck:** I think that's very dishonest of you. Clearly the arrangement has changed, and you can no longer park in my driveway or else your car will be towed.

## Room temperature

Noun

One of the steps in making kombucha is to boil your tea and sugar for a while, then let it cool down to **room temperature**. You do this so that you don't burn and kill the SCOBY. **Room temperature** is a temperature that is not too hot and not too cold. This term is commonly applied to liquids and food. If you leave a glass of water out on the kitchen table, no matter if it started off very hot or very cold, it will eventually reach the same temperature as the room it is in.

You can also use **room temperature** literally. People, couples in particular, often argue about what the proper **room temperature** should be.

Here are a couple more examples with **room temperature**:

**Bradley:** Is something wrong?

**Winston:** What do you mean?

**Bradley:** You haven't taken a sip of your coffee yet.

**Winston:** Oh, that's normal. I don't like it too hot. In fact, I prefer coffee that's **room temperature**. I find I don't taste all the flavours when it's too hot.

**Joanne:** Wow. It's nice and warm in here.

**Mikaela:** It's just how I like it.

**Joanne:** It wasn't as warm as this the last time I came over.

**Mikaela:** I know. Gary is away on business this weekend, so I can set the **room temperature** to whatever I want. But don't tell Gary. He's always complaining about the heating bill.

**Joanne:** OK. It's our little secret.

## To pass out

Phrasal verb

Talking about Shine Muscat grapes, Andrew says that his wife bought a bunch of them for about \$30. At the time, he almost **passed out**. In this sense, **to pass out** is to faint out of shock. For Andrew, the price was so high that he almost fainted. He is using this expression jokingly.

Another common usage of **to pass out** involves alcohol. When someone drinks too much alcohol and loses consciousness, they **passed out**.

You can also **pass out** through exhaustion. For example, after completing a marathon, runners often **pass out**. That means they collapse after crossing the finishing line.

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

**Vera:** How did you tell your husband that you're pregnant?

**May:** It's kind of a funny story. I had just taken the pregnancy when he picked me up in his car. I was really nervous and didn't know how or when to tell him. So I just blurted it out.

**Vera:** Oh my god! You told him while he was driving?

**May:** I know. It's so dangerous! He almost **passed out** from the shock. But he's smart, so he immediately parked the car on the side of the road so we could talk.

**Vera:** Geez! Pick a better time next time.

**John:** I'm sorry I left the party early.

**Nicko:** No problem.

**John:** How did it end?

**Nicko:** Actually, I'm not proud of this, but I think I drank too much and **passed out**. I don't remember how everything turned out.

## To grow sick of [something]

### Idiom

When Kassy makes a batch of kombucha, it's usually 4 litres at a time. Hearing this, Andrew asks Kassy if it gets tiresome to finish it all. Kassy says that she hasn't yet **grown sick of it**. **To grow sick of [something]** is to do something so much or so often that you no longer enjoy it. For example, if you eat the same dish every single day, you might **grow sick of it**. You might feel sick just thinking of that dish.

**To grow tired of [something]** is a common variation on the same idea. For example, if you like romantic comedies but all of the movies you watch have the same plotline, you might **grow tired of watching them**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to grow sick of [something]**:

**Chip:** By the way, what did you end up eating last night?

**Billy:** We had Korean barbecue.

**Chip:** Again? It seems like you have that every other night.

**Billy:** We do, but I doubt I'll ever **grow sick of it**. I'm sure I can eat that every day. We should go out together some day.

**Chip:** Sure. I'm sure that by now you know all the good places.

**Billy:** Indeed I do.

**Burt:** Did you hear the story Timo told during the lunch break?

**Sally:** No. I didn't listen.

**Burt:** Why not? It was so funny.

**Sally:** To tell you the truth, I'm kind of **growing tired of his stories**. It's always the same thing. Also, half of his stories aren't even true.



## Quiz

- 1. What is the most important aspect of the expression to keep regular?**
  - a) to go to the washroom
  - b) to go to bed early
  - c) to have your body cycles regular
  - d) to watch TV every day
  
- 2. Which of the following is the better example of being under the assumption of something?**
  - a) you think you know the truth
  - b) you know the absolute truth
  
- 3. What does it mean to grow sick of [something] you eat?**
  - a) you no longer enjoy it
  - b) you vomit when you eat it
  - c) you will never get tired of it
  - d) you eat it sometimes
  
- 4. What is NOT a reason someone might pass out?**
  - a) drinking too much
  - b) enjoying a movie
  - c) being exhausted
  - d) hearing shocking news
  
- 5. True or false? Cold water taken out of the fridge is immediately room temperature.**
  - a) true
  - b) false

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## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever tried kombucha? From what you have heard, does it sounds like something you would try?
2. Have you ever tried brewing something like kombucha, apart from tea and coffee? Why or why not?
3. In terms of health, how important is it for you to keep regular?
4. What is a food or drink that you think you will never grow sick of?
5. When was the last time you heard such shocking news that you almost passed out?

## Quiz Answers

1. c   2. a   3. a   4. b   5. b

### Episode credits

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