

Episode 1 – Cake confusion

Hello and welcome to YLYK English. I'm Emily and today we are going to be talking about cake.

Cake is a sweet bread common in many English-speaking countries and it is also the source of several confusing sayings. I think that there are so many cake sayings because cake is so popular. It is also an easy food to make and one of the first that many children learn to cook by themselves. And so, when we are describing an easy task, we often say that it is a '**piece of cake**'. There is a similar saying '**easy as pie**' and sometimes the two are confused.

Let's listen to a dialogue between two people: Emma and Jim about these two confusing sayings.

Jim: Emma, can you help me put this desk together? It looks pretty complicated and I've got a buyer coming for it in two hours.

Emma: Sure. [she looks at the diagram instructions]. No problem Jim, it'll be a piece of pie!

Jim: [laughing] Don't you mean a **piece of cake**?

Emma: Yes I do. It's easy to get those two mixed up, isn't it? **Easy as pie** and a **piece of cake**.

Jim: Hmm ... now I'm hungry. Okay, let's put the desk together and get some cake. My treat!

A good way to avoid mixing up the two phrases is to remember that each saying only has one letter **P**.

So it's a "**P**iece of cake" or it's as "easy as **P**ie".

Cake is so popular that it is a common prize at local events. Therefore, the phrase '**take the cake**' means to win a contest.

"That takes the cake" is a statement of admiration for a job well done. It means that someone has such a good job that they deserve a reward. The reward isn't actually a cake, just some praise.

Please note, that this phrase is sometimes used sarcastically. "Oh, well that just takes the cake!" is an expression of annoyance over a job done badly.

And because a cake is meant to be shared, a cake is often used to describe sharing something. '**A slice of the cake**' means a share of the money from a joint endeavour.

Now let's go back to Emma and Jim.

Emma: All done! That desk looks great Jim. It really '**takes the cake**'.

Jim: Thanks Emma. Couldn't have done it without you. I should be able to sell it to the buyer now. I'll give you a '**slice of the cake**'.

In the dialogue above, Emma is complimenting Jim on their efforts to build the desk properly and in time to be collected by the buyer. It '**takes the cake**'.

Because Emma helped Jim to build the desk, he is going to share some of the money from the sale of the desk with her. It is her '**slice of the cake**'.

Back to Emma and Jim.

Jim: [counting money] Here's your '**slice of the cake**' Emma. Thanks again.

Emma: [taking the money] You're welcome Jim. But I get the feeling that there's something you're not telling me.

Jim: You're right. That was the first of 25 desks that I have to assemble in the next two days. Can you help me out? I'll pay you the same amount of money for each one.

Emma: Sure. Desks this good will 'sell like **hotcakes**'.

Emma is saying that these desks are so good that they will sell very quickly. They will '**sell like hotcakes**'. Hotcakes are an extremely popular snack and commonly sold at fairs and festivals across America. Hotcakes are also called pancakes.

And now back to Jim and Emma and their desk building efforts and cake sayings.

Emma: [assembling a desk] Actually Jim, I was thinking I could use a desk myself. How about instead of paying me a piece of the sale price for each one, you give me one of the desks?

Jim: [finishing up a call] Sorry Emma, you were right about these desks '**selling like hotcakes**'. That was my next buyer. She just bought all these desks.

Emma: [shrugs] Well, I guess '**you can't have your cake and eat it too**'.

Jim: [hands her a piece of cake on a plate] True.

Emma has used one of the most peculiar sayings in the English language. '**You can't have your cake and eat it too**' means that there are two options in a situation, and you can only pick one. You cannot do both at the same time. Once you eat the cake, you no longer have it (except in your stomach). This saying uses an older definition of the word 'have', which might be better translated as 'keep'.

You cannot have the two incompatible things of 'keep the cake' and 'eat the cake'.

And in the dialogue between Emma and Jim, Emma can't receive money for helping to build the desks **and** have one of the desks instead of the money. She can only have one option, not both.

'You can't have your cake and eat it too' is also used to describe a situation where you can't have everything that you want in a negotiation.

For example: The huge challenges that Brexit negotiations have presented have been a clear lesson to supporters of the Leave campaign that you can't have your cake and eat it too.

A similar phrase is 'you can't have it both ways'.

So to recap on our cake related sayings:

If a task is very easy you can say it is 'easy as **Pie**' or a '**Piece of cake**'. Remember, only one **P** per saying!

You can compliment someone's excellent efforts by saying that they can '**take the cake**'. Please note, that this same saying can be used ironically. If someone is negatively describing someone's actions as 'well that takes the cake' then they are being sarcastic.

A '**slice of the cake**' is a share of the proceeds from a joint effort.

To '**sell like hotcakes**' means that an item is very popular and will sell out quickly.

And the curious expression '**you can't have your cake and eat it too**' means that you must choose between two options. The phrase is also used to describe a negotiation where you shouldn't ask for more than is fair.

Thanks for sharing today's tasty lesson with me today. I hope you are more confident using and understanding these common sayings in English. See you next time.