
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Dog detectors



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Dan

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English– the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six new items of vocabulary. I'm Dan...

Neil

...And I'm Neil. We'll be discussing dogs being used in cancer detection.

Dan

Everything ok, Neil?

Neil

I am so tired. One of my children **is as sick as a dog**. I didn't sleep all night long looking after them.

Dan

As sick as a dog is an expression meaning 'very ill'. I'm sorry to hear it. Try and hold on if you can.

Neil

Don't worry. There's life in this old dog yet.

Dan

Good. It's funny that you mention dogs because apparently, the UK's National Health Service is currently assessing whether dogs can be used to detect early stage prostate cancer.

Neil

Amazing. Any success?

Dan

Let me ask you in this week's question. In what percentage of cases were dogs able to detect the presence of cancer in urine? Is it

a) 50%

b) 70%

c) 90%

Neil

I'm going to guess a) 50%

Dan

We'll find out later if you're right or wrong. So, Neil, I say dog, what do you think?

Neil

A wet nose, four **paws**, which is what we call the feet of certain animals, a fluffy coat and a waggy tail? Man's best friend? But I've never heard of cancer dogs. I wonder what makes them suitable?

Dan

Well, I'll let Dr Claire Guest, CEO of the charity Medical Detection Dogs take that one.

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Dr Claire Guest, CEO of Medical Detection Dogs

Although the dog has a fluffy coat and a waggy tail, he is in fact a highly sophisticated **bio-sensor**. You know, evolution has given him this highly sensitive nose, going down to parts per trillion. People board planes every day that have been **screened** by detector dogs to see if there are explosives on board. Why do we rely on them there and yet not in assisting us with health?

Dan

So, dogs have evolved to have a highly-developed sense of smell that allows them to act as a **bio-sensor**, a sensor which uses a living thing to detect chemicals.

Neil

Yes, and she mentioned that humans have a history of using dogs in security to **screen**, or examine for suitability, for explosives and bombs.

Dan

Yep! Can you think of any other places that dogs are used to support humans?

Neil

Well, there's guide dogs, or seeing-eye dogs as they're known in North America. They help people who are blind to avoid danger.

Dan

Nice. Any more? Maybe around the home?

Neil

Are you referring to guard dogs, meaning 'a dog which keeps a house or place safe from burglary, theft or trespassing.'

Dan

Yep. Ex-burglars have often said that they're a much bigger **deterrent**, or reason not to do something, than an alarm system.

Neil

Oh and there's rescue dogs. They are trained to search and find victims of natural disasters such as avalanches or earthquakes.

Dan

Exactly, dogs are perfect for situations where people may be buried under the earth or the snow. A human can't see them but a dog can still smell them.

Neil

Do you think our National Health Service will employ them as full time **biosensors** then?

Dan

Well, I don't know, but here's what Jeremy Hunt, the UK Health Secretary had to say on the matter.

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Jeremy Hunt, Health Secretary

One of our jobs as MPs is sometimes to question **orthodoxies**, so if this research is good then I want to know about it, and I will certainly look at it carefully.

Dan

He mentions that this type of research goes against **orthodoxies**, or generally accepted way of doing things. But he also mentions that he will be looking at it carefully. So let's hope so.

Neil

Yes I wouldn't mind having a dog doctor! And speaking of research, there was a question I need to know the answer to.

Dan

Oh yes. I asked you in what percentage of cases were dogs able to detect the presence of cancer in urine?

a) 50%

b) 70%

c) 90%

Neil

And I said 50%

Dan

It's a dog's life, Neil. I'm sorry. The answer was c) 90%

Neil

Wow! 90%! That's amazing.

Dan

Isn't it?

Neil

Shall we go through the vocabulary?

Dan

OK. The first expression we had was **as sick as a dog**. If you are **as sick as a dog** it means that you're very sick indeed. When was the last time you were **as sick as a dog**, Neil?

Neil

Just after Christmas I caught a bug from my kids. I was **as sick as a dog**. Next we had **paws**. **Paws** are the feet of certain animals. They have pads and claws. Can you give us a few examples, Dan?

Dan

Well, dogs have **paws**. So do cats, rabbits, bears and mice. But not horses, sheep or pigs. They have hooves. After **paws**, we had **biosensor**. A **biosensor** is a combination of the words biology and sensor. It is a sensor which uses a living thing to detect chemicals. Can you think of a famous historical example, Neil?

Neil

Well, Miners in danger of a highly toxic but invisible gas called methane used to carry a canary in a cage down the mine with them. If the canary became ill or died, they knew that the air was toxic. Then we had **screen**. If you screen something, it means you examine it for its suitability, such as luggage going through an airport – where they would **screen** for explosives. How else can it be used, Dan?

Dan

Well, these days you can get an ad-blocker on your computer that will **screen out** those annoying pop-up adverts. I hate those! After that was **deterrent**. A deterrent is a thing which stops a person from doing something, such as the fear of punishment for a crime. How do you deter your children from being naughty, Neil?

Neil

That's easy. I just threaten to remove a sticker from their sticker chart.

Dan

Good idea!

Neil

Finally, we heard **orthodoxies**. An **orthodoxy** is a generally accepted way of doing things. Its adjective is **orthodox** and we often hear its opposite word – **unorthodox**, meaning unusual. Do you do anything **unorthodox**, Dan?

Dan

Well I love to combine hot sausages and cold vanilla ice-cream. It's delicious! But no one will trust me enough to try!

Neil

I don't blame them! Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Dan

And we are on social media too - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. See you there.

Both

Bye!