

Now, the VOA Special English program, Words and Their Stories.

Some unusual words describe how a person spends his or her time. For example, someone who likes to spend a lot of time sitting or lying down while watching television is sometimes called a “couch potato.” A couch is a piece of furniture that people sit on while watching television.

Robert Armstrong, an artist from California, developed the term couch potato in 1976. Several years later, he listed the term as a trademark with the United States government. Mr. Armstrong also helped write a funny book about life as a full-time television watcher. It is called the “Official Couch Potato Handbook.”

Couch potatoes enjoy watching television just as “mouse potatoes” enjoy working on computers. A computer mouse is the device that moves the pointer, or cursor, on a computer screen. The description of mouse potato became popular in 1993. American writer Alice Kahn is said to have invented the term to describe young people who spend a lot of time using computers.

Too much time inside the house using a computer or watching television can cause someone to get “cabin fever.” A cabin is a simple house usually built far away from the city. People go to a cabin to relax and enjoy quiet time.

Cabin fever is not really a disease. However, people can experience boredom and restlessness if they spend too much time inside their homes. This is especially true during the winter when it is too cold or snowy to do things outside. Often children get cabin fever if they cannot go outside to play. So do their parents. This happens when there is so much snow that schools and even offices and stores are closed.

Some people enjoy spending a lot of time in their homes to make them nice places to live. This is called "nesting" or "cocooning." Birds build nests out of sticks to hold their eggs and baby birds. Some insects build cocoons around themselves for protection while they grow and change. Nests and cocoons provide security for wildlife. So people like the idea of nests and cocoons, too.

The terms cocooning and nesting became popular more than 20 years ago. They describe people buying their first homes and filling them with many things. These people then had children.

Now these children are grown and have "left the nest." They are in college. Or they are married and starting families of their own far away. Now these parents are living alone without children in their "empty nest." They have become "empty nesters."

(THEME)



This VOA Special English program, WORDS AND THEIR STORIES, was written by Jill Moss. I'm Faith Lapidus.