



American Expression E0619 On the back burner

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The phrase "on the back burner" is an idiom used to describe a situation or issue that is temporarily put aside or given lower priority. When something is "on the back burner," it means it is not currently receiving immediate attention or action, but it hasn't been forgotten or abandoned entirely.

The origin of the expression can be traced back to cooking terminology. When cooking on a stove, dishes that require less immediate attention or those that need to simmer or slow-cook for a longer time are often moved to the back burners. This allows the cook to focus on more urgent or time-sensitive tasks while still keeping the other dishes in progress.

In a broader context, "on the back burner" can refer to various situations, tasks, or projects that have been postponed or delayed for various reasons. This could be due to the presence of more pressing matters that demand immediate attention, limited resources, or a strategic decision to defer certain activities until a later time.

Using something "on the back burner" doesn't necessarily imply neglect or disregard; it merely indicates a temporary delay in giving it full attention. It suggests that the matter is still acknowledged and may be revisited or brought to the forefront when the time is right.

In personal or professional settings, people often prioritize their tasks and responsibilities based on urgency and importance. When facing multiple demands on their time and resources, individuals may need to place certain projects or goals "on the back burner" to focus on more critical matters. This could include delaying personal projects, career aspirations, or long-term plans until other immediate challenges are addressed.

Additionally, "on the back burner" can be used in interpersonal contexts to describe relationships or issues that are not currently the primary focus. For example, if two friends are going through challenging times and their usual outings and communication are reduced, they may say their friendship is "on the back burner" for the time being.

While putting something "on the back burner" can be a practical approach to managing multiple responsibilities, it is essential to reassess and address these deferred matters at a later time. Neglecting them indefinitely may lead to missed opportunities or unfulfilled goals. It is crucial to find a balance between addressing immediate needs and making room for longer-term objectives.

In conclusion, "on the back burner" is an idiom that signifies temporarily setting something aside or giving it lower priority due to other pressing matters or constraints. The expression originated from cooking, where dishes are moved to the back burners to simmer while more immediate tasks are attended to. In personal, professional, and interpersonal contexts, people often prioritize their time and resources, resulting in certain projects or issues being deferred. While using the back burner strategy can be practical, it's important to revisit and address these matters later to ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach to responsibilities and goals.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever found yourself putting important personal goals or projects "on the back burner"? How do you decide when it's appropriate to prioritize immediate needs versus longer-term aspirations?
2. In the workplace, how do you and your team manage competing tasks and responsibilities, and what strategies do you employ to ensure important projects don't get permanently sidelined?
3. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know placed a relationship "on the back burner"? What were the reasons for this decision, and how was the situation eventually addressed?
4. How do different cultures and societies view the concept of "on the back burner," and are there cultural factors that influence how people prioritize tasks and responsibilities?
5. What are some potential downsides or risks of consistently putting important matters "on the back burner"? How can individuals and organizations strike a balance between immediate demands and long-term objectives to ensure nothing important is overlooked or neglected?