



## American Expression E2616 On a tear

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“On a tear” is an informal idiomatic expression used to describe a period of intense activity, strong emotion, or rapid success. When someone is on a tear, they are moving forward with unusual energy and force, often accomplishing a great deal in a short amount of time. The phrase can describe positive momentum, such as winning repeatedly, but it can also refer to emotional outbursts or aggressive behavior.

The origin of the phrase is linked to the older meaning of the word “tear,” which once referred to a wild rush or violent spree. In the nineteenth century, people used the word to describe someone who was rampaging or behaving uncontrollably. Over time, the expression softened and evolved. Today, it more commonly suggests high productivity or impressive performance rather than chaos.

In sports, the phrase is frequently used in a positive sense. An athlete who scores repeatedly over several games, or a team that dominates its opponents in a winning streak, is said to be on a tear. The emphasis is on unstoppable momentum. The player appears confident, focused, and difficult to defeat. Success seems to follow naturally from their rhythm and intensity.

In professional or creative settings, being on a tear can describe someone who is completing projects quickly, generating ideas rapidly, or making significant progress. For example, a writer who produces several chapters in a few days or an entrepreneur who secures multiple deals in a short period might be described this way. The phrase captures both speed and determination.

However, “on a tear” can also have a negative meaning when it refers to anger or destructive behavior. A person who is shouting at others, criticizing everything, or reacting aggressively may be described as being on a tear. In this context, the expression emphasizes emotional intensity rather than achievement. It suggests a loss of control or an overwhelming surge of feeling.

The dual nature of the phrase reflects the power of intensity itself. Strong energy can produce remarkable results when directed constructively, but it can also cause harm when guided by frustration or anger. Therefore, the expression reminds us that momentum and passion are powerful forces that require balance and self-awareness.

In conclusion being on a tear describes a period of heightened intensity, whether in success, productivity, or emotion. It conveys movement, speed, and force, highlighting how bursts of energy can shape outcomes dramatically. While such moments can lead to impressive accomplishments, they also require control and direction to ensure that intensity remains a source of growth rather than disruption.

### Questions for Discussion

1. How does being on a tear differ from simply being on a roll in terms of intensity and emotional tone?
2. In what situations can being on a tear lead to positive outcomes, and when might it become harmful?
3. How can someone maintain control and balance while experiencing a burst of intense productivity or emotion?
4. What role does confidence play when a person is on a tear in sports or professional life?
5. Can periods of being on a tear be sustained long-term, or are they naturally temporary? Why?