Idiomatic Expressions with “Tener”

An idiom is an expression that cannot be immediately understood by analyzing its literal meaning. A few examples of idioms in English are:
- to be “on the go”
- to “play the field”
- to “jump the gun”

Spanish also has many idiomatic expressions. Although their literal translations sound odd to English speakers, they sound perfectly natural to native speakers. Here is one example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>Hace mucho frío</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literally</td>
<td>It makes much cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Meaning</td>
<td>It is very cold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many idiomatic expressions that use the verb tener. This one expresses age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom</th>
<th>tener _____ años</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literally</td>
<td>to have _____ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Meaning</td>
<td>to be _____ years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many other expressions using tener express physical sensations:
- tener frío — to be cold
- tener calor — to be hot
- tener hambre — to be hungry
- tener sed — to be thirsty
- tener sueño — to be sleepy
- tener dolor de — to hurt or be sore, etc.

There are also many idiomatic expressions with tener that express sensations more psychological in nature:
- tener prisa — to be in a hurry
- tener miedo a/de + noun — to be afraid of something
- tener miedo a/de + infinitive — to be afraid to do something
- tener celos — to be jealous
- tener confianza — to be confident
- tener cuidado — to be careful
- tener vergüenza — to be ashamed

There are other idiomatic expressions with tener as well:
- tener razón — to be right
- tener éxito — to be successful
- tener la culpa — to be guilty
- tener suerte — to be lucky
- tener lugar — to take place
- tener ganas de — to feel like
- tener en cuenta — to take into account
When using these idiomatic expressions, conjugate the verb (tener) according to the subject of the sentence.

Yo **tengo** cinco años.
Tú **tienes** ocho años.
Pablo **tiene** dos años.

Notice that the expressions combine the verb tener with a noun:

- el año los celos
- el frío la confianza
- el calor el cuidado
- la hambre la vergüenza
- la sed la razón
- el sueño el éxito
- el dolor la culpa
- la prisa la suerte
- el miedo el lugar

Because the expressions with tener use nouns, they are modified with adjectives, not adverbs.

Tengo frío.
Tengo **mucho** frío. (**not** muy)

The first practice exercise and test will cover ten of the most common and useful of these expressions:

- tener _____ años
- tener calor
- tener frío
- tener hambre
- tener sed
- tener prisa
- tener miedo a/de _____
- tener razón
- tener suerte

Practice exercises 2–4 and test 2 will cover all of the expressions in this lesson.