

How to Sniff and Whine

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Нытик: whiner

As we head into the holiday season, the frozen mud and bare trees, pitch-black mornings — remind me again why staying in daylight time was such a good idea — and nonstop traffic jams might be making you a wee bit crabby. If you're so grumpy that you're working up to a full-blown Scrooge impersonation, here is a short guide to grumbling in Russian.

Жаловаться (to complain). A neutral word for complaining of all kinds. A doctor might ask you: На что жалуетесь? (“What seems to be the problem?” or “Where does it hurt?”) Or your significant other might ask you: На что ты жалуешься? (literally, “what are you complaining about?”). This really means: “I’m working my fingers to the bone for you at a job I hate with an endless commute and putting up with your grandfather living with us — and you think you have something to complain about?” Only possible response: Да нет, милый. Ешь. (Of course not, dear. Have something to eat.)

Ныть (to ache, to whine). When the doc asks you what hurts, you might reply: Ноет

поясница. (My lower back aches.) But if you keep nattering on about your aching back from long hours at the computer, your family might say: Хватит ныть! (Quit your bellyaching!) Or worse, they might start calling you a нытик (a whiner). Мой дедушка — нытик. То у него всё болит, то сердце стучит, то пульс низкий, то высокий. (My grandfather is a whiner. Either he's got aches all over, or his heart is pounding, or his pulse is too slow or too fast.) Only possible response: Как жаль! Ешь. (I'm so sorry! Have something to eat.)

Брюзжать (to grumble). Lovely onomatopoeic word that used to describe an annoying buzzing, as in: Мухи брюзжат. (Flies are buzzing around.) Describes grumbling, often muttered under the breath. Дедушка живёт у нас, всем недоволен, постоянно брюзжит. (My grandfather is living with us. He's unhappy with everything and constantly grumbles.) Only possible response: Дед! Иди на кухню и поешь что-нибудь. (Grandpa! Go to the kitchen and have something to eat.)

Ворчать (to whimper, whine). This is what dogs do when they want that sandwich you just made for Grandpa. Also said of querulous or peevish griping by humans, often uttered под нос (literally “under his nose”) so that no one can make out the words. Дед на всех ворчит. Нельзя разобрать, что он ворчит себе под нос. (Grandpa grouches at everyone. You can't hear what he's muttering about.) Only possible response: Дед! Чай готов! Иди с нами перекусить. (Grandpa! Tea is ready! Come have a bite to eat with us.)

Бухтеть (to whine). Same as ворчать, only slangier. Что он там бухтит? (What is he griping about?) Only possible response: Дед! На — попробуй пирога. (Grandpa! Here — try some pie.)

Фыркать (to snort, snap, or sniff). Фыркать is what horses do — blow air through their nose. It can be used to describe any snort or sniff of disdain. Дед фыркал по поводу бейсбола, считая его абсурдным занятием. (Grandpa snorted about baseball, which he thought was a ridiculous game.) It can also describe a short, ill-tempered outburst. Мне стыдно, но когда он всё время ноет, я фыркаю на него. (I'm ashamed of myself, but when he grouches all the time I snap at him.)

Only possible response: Иди на кухню. Я тебе налью. (Come into the kitchen, and let me pour you a drink.)

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