

Why do our ears 'pop' on planes?

The eardrum is a thin membrane that helps to transmit sound. Air pressure is exerted on both sides of the eardrum; with the surrounding atmospheric pressure pushing it inwards while air being delivered via a tube between the back of your nose and the eardrum pushes it outwards. This tube is called the Eustachian tube, and when you swallow it opens and a small bubble of air is able to move causing a 'pop'.

Rapid altitude changes in planes make the 'pop' much more noticeable due to bigger differences in pressure. Air pressure decreases as a plane ascends; hence air must exit the Eustachian tubes to equalise these pressures, again causing a 'pop'. Conversely, as a plane descends, the air pressure starts to increase; therefore the Eustachian tubes must open to allow through more air in order to equalise the pressure again, causing another 'pop'.

What are freckles?

Freckles are clusters of the pigment melanin. It is produced by melanocytes deep in the skin, with greater concentrations giving rise to darker skin tones, and hence, ethnicity. Melanin protects the skin against harmful ultraviolet sunlight, but is also found in other locations around the body. Freckles are mostly genetically inherited, but not always. They become more prominent during sunlight exposure, as the melanocytes are triggered to increase production of melanin, leading to a darker complexion. People with freckles generally have pale skin tones, and if they stay in the Sun for too long they can damage their skin cells, leading to skin cancers like melanoma.

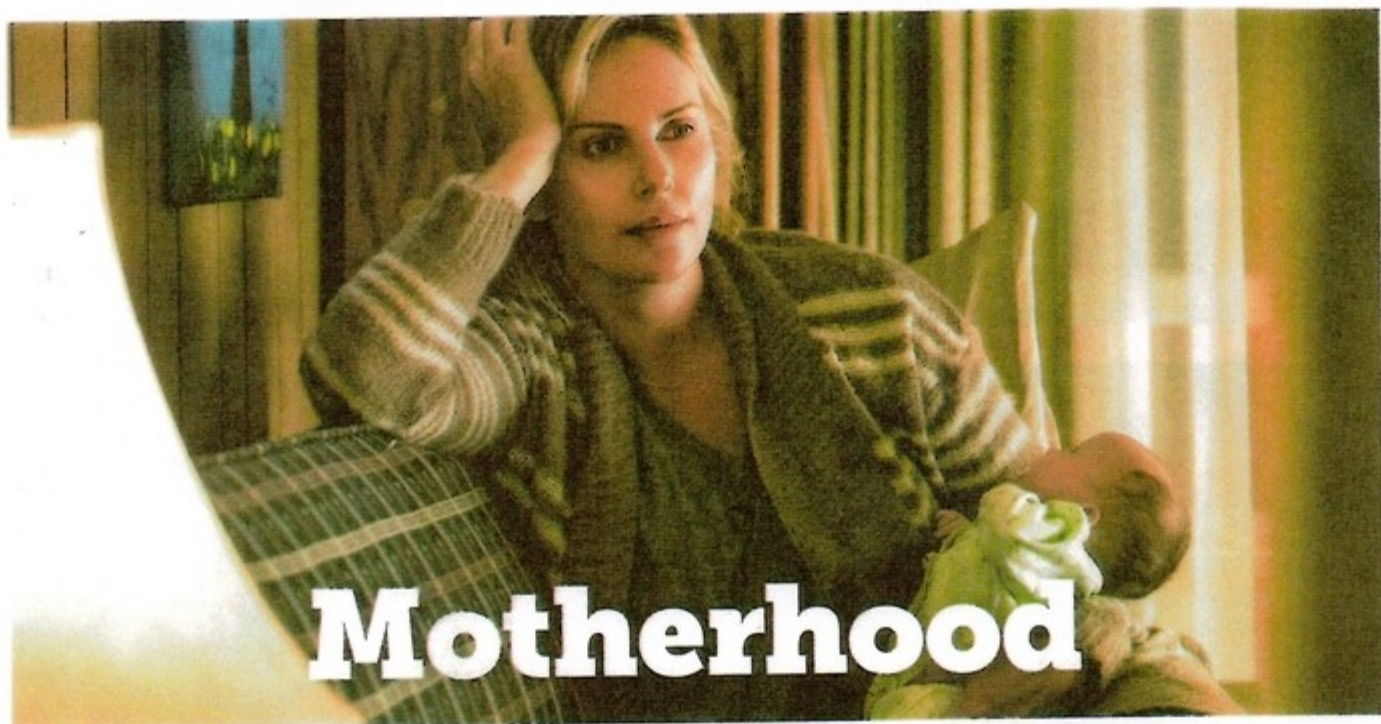


"Rapid altitude changes make the 'pop' much more noticeable"

Why does hot honey and lemon help your throat when it's sore?

Honey and lemon can be drunk warm as a comfort remedy, and is a popular drink with many who are feeling unwell. The idea is that honey coats the throat and therefore any inflamed areas will be 'protected' by a layer of honey, while at the same time soothing painful areas. This means it will be

less painful when these areas come into contact with other surfaces when you eat or swallow. Lemon also helps to settle the stomach too, as it contains acid, which can be particularly helpful when experiencing an upset stomach from the effects of a cold or other digestion-related illness.



Motherhood

È considerato il momento più appagante della vita di una donna, ma tante altre emozioni si celano dietro la maternità. Delle recenti produzioni artistiche ce ne parlano senza tabù.

UPPER INTERMEDIATE B2

GLOSSARY

- 1 **countless**: infinite
- 2 **pregnant**: incinte
- 3 **to give birth**: partorire
- 4 **is not all peaches and cream**: non è tutto rose e fiori
- 5 **misgivings**: dubbi
- 6 **downsides**: svantaggi
- 7 **screenplay**: sceneggiatura
- 8 **newborn**: neonato
- 9 **on the edge of a nervous breakdown**: sull'orlo di un esaurimento nervoso
- 10 **to lead**: portare, indurre
- 11 **letdown**: delusione, disappunto
- 12 **deprivation**: mancanza
- 13 **to try one's best**: fare del proprio meglio
- 14 **to struggle**: lottare, fare fatica
- 15 **overwhelming**: schiacciante
- 16 **to regret**: pentirsi

On Instagram there are countless¹ pictures of wonderful smiling pregnant² women or stylish mothers who have just given birth³

and have retained their perfectly-shaped bodies. But although it is generally considered to be the best stage of a woman's life, a moment of fulfillment and absolute joy, motherhood is not all peaches and cream⁴.

Artists are beginning to show their misgivings⁵ and the downsides⁶ of parenting from the woman's point of view. Last year, American writer and director Diablo Cody, who won an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay⁷ for *Juno*, portrayed a mother-of-two with a third newborn⁸ in *Tully*, starring Oscar-winning actress Charlize Theron.

Like the main character Marlo, who is on the edge of a nervous breakdown⁹, during and after pregnancy many women feel ugly, uncomfortable with their bodies and useless; unable to achieve the rosy experiences they have been led¹⁰ to expect. Australian comedy series *The*

*Letdown*¹¹ also shows motherhood in a realistic way. Audrey is a new mum who had a difficult pregnancy and now is dealing with sleep deprivation¹², loneliness and feeling misunderstood. While she tries her best¹³ to go through the early phase of motherhood, she has to face other people's judgements.

Many things are changing with parenting, but women are usually the ones who struggle¹⁴ more to combine work and family life. In the autobiographical *Motherhood* by Canadian writer Sheila Heti, the author explores the difficult choice not to have children. While motherhood is often seen as natural, some women have no desire to be mothers. Even today, social pressure can be overwhelming¹⁵ and cause anxiety to those who may even be regarded as 'bad' women. Another taboo is that of regretting¹⁶

having children, as sociologist Orna Donath expressed in her *Regretting Motherhood*. After extensive research interviewing women from different backgrounds, Donath found that many women thought that they had lost themselves as a result of having children, even though they love them. ☺

SHEILA HETI
MOTHERHOOD