
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Chins



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Rob.

Neil

And I'm Neil. Hello.

Rob

Hi there, Neil. Hardly a day goes by without hearing someone talking about some aspect of our bodies. Do you know what I mean, Neil?

Neil

Oh, yes, Rob. Almost every part of our anatomy seems to be the subject of endless debate. It could be our stomachs and what we eat. It could be our posture and how we stand. It could be our skin and how we should look after it.

Rob

Yes, I know, it gets very **tedious** – that means boring – so I don't really take any notice, as you can see! But there's one part of our body you don't hear much about – and that is the chin.

Neil

The chin? You mean the small bit of bone under the mouth? It's not the most interesting part, is it Rob? I mean, it doesn't do anything, does it? I must admit I've never even thought about it. What's it for, anyway?

Rob

Well, some people think it's very useful for folding up large sheets and towels. You know, you hold one end under your chin like that with it...

Neil

Come on, Rob, you're not being serious!

Rob

Of course not. But seriously, the more you think about it, the more interesting the chin becomes.

Neil

You've still got to convince me, Rob. A chin is just a chin. That's all there is to it.

Rob

Not so fast, Neil. The chin may turn out to be a more important part of the body than you think. But before we get into that, let's turn to the quiz. **Chin up**, Neil.

Neil

A good phrase - it means stay positive and optimistic.

Rob

OK well how optimistic are you about getting this question right? How long ago do you think humans developed chins? Was it...

- a) 150,000 years ago?
- b) 2 million years ago? or
- c) 5 million years ago?

Neil

Hmm. I have no idea. They all sound **far-fetched** to me. Far-fetched means something is difficult to believe. But I think I'll go for 2 million years ago.

Rob

'B'. Okay. Well, we'll find out if you're right or wrong later on. But the first thing to say is that humans are the only animals to have developed a chin. Let's listen to Dr James Pampush from the University of Florida. What word does he use to mean it sticks out?

Dr James Pampush from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Florida

Humans are the only animal that have a chin and by that I mean, you have this bony **projection** underneath your teeth that sticks out past your teeth on the lower portion of your **jaw** and it's such an unusual feature, that in a way it sort of helps define what it means to be human.

Neil

So he used the word **projection** which means something that sticks out from the main surface.

Rob

And the word **jaw** is used to describe the lower part of the face, which the chin is part of. So, we now know exactly what the chin is. But why did it develop?

Neil

Now from what I understand, Rob, it has a lot to do with when humans started to cook their food, so the food they ate became much softer. Therefore, our **ancestors** – that's the people related to us from a long time ago – they didn't need powerful jaws or sharp teeth anymore. And, strangely, that made the jaw drop and produced that odd piece of bone we know as the chin.

Rob

But some time later the chin became associated with sexual attraction in men. Males with **prominent** – that means easy to see - jaws were supposed to be attractive to women. And men with small chins were thought to be unattractive or weak people. They were even called **chinless wonders** sometimes.

Neil

Chinless wonder, an interesting phrase! So, let's have a look at yours, Rob. Are you a chinless wonder? Mmm. Looks pretty normal to me. How about mine?

Rob

Well, Neil, your chin is rather pointed if you don't mind me saying. But I'm not sure what that means, to be honest. So, let's move swiftly on. Let's hear what Dr Pampush has to say about this. He uses a word that means this theory is likely to be true.

Dr James Pampush from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Florida

It seems **plausible** to me that chins emerged as some kind of feature and then later were selected to be sex ornaments. But not the presence of the chin but, rather, the shape of the chin being some kind of marker for sexual identity.

Neil

The word he used was **plausible** meaning something that is acceptable or believable.

Rob

The word chin has also given us some interesting expressions. A **double chin**, for example, describes loose skin hanging beneath the chin which makes people look like they've got two chins! It's something that people don't like and often try to get rid of.

Neil

And then there's the verb to **chinwag**. That means to talk a lot or to chat in a relaxed way with friends. A chinwag tends to be a conversation about things that aren't very important – but our conversation about chins is very important!

Rob

I guess so Neil, OK – so how about the answer to that question I asked you earlier? I asked

you how long ago did humans develop chins? Was it a) 150,000 years ago? b) 2 million years ago or c) 5 million years ago?

Neil

And I said 2 million years ago.

Rob

You know your chins, you were right. Well done!

Neil

Ah brilliant!

Rob

Chins really have been around for a long time. Now, before we go, it's time to remind ourselves of some of the vocabulary that we've heard today. Neil.

Neil

tedious
chin up
far-fetched
projection
jaw
ancestors
prominent
chinless wonder
plausible
double chin
chinwag

Rob

Thanks Neil. Well, that brings us to the end of today's 6 Minute English. We hope you've enjoyed the programme. You can hear plenty more on our website at www.bbclearningenglish.com. Please join us again soon. Bye bye.

Neil

Goodbye.

Vocabulary

tedious

boring or uninteresting

chin up

stay positive or optimistic

far-fetched

difficult to believe

projection

something that sticks out from a surface

jaw

lower part of the face

ancestors

people related to us from a long time ago

prominent

easy to see or notice

chinless wonder

a weak person

plausible

acceptable or believable

double chin

loose skin under the jaw

chinwag

talk with friends in a relaxed way