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First discovered in the corona surrounding the sun and later found in gases leaking from Mount Vesuvius, helium is the second-most abundant element in the universe.

The second element on the Periodic Table of Elements is inert, colorless and odorless, but far from boring. Helium shows up in semi-conductors and birthday balloons. Because of its extremely low density, helium floats in air. The low density is also responsible for the weird "squeaky voice" effect when helium is inhaled. The less dense the gas surrounding the vocal cords, the faster they vibrate, sending the voice's pitch skyward.

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At first, no one thought the discovery of helium in natural gas had much application. But during WWI, military leaders and scientists began to push for helium's use in blimps. Helium blimps weren't used much in WWI because of the cost of production, according to the American Chemistry Society, but they became much more common in WWII, by which time the cost of helium had dropped.

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Today, helium is frequently found in labs that require extra-cold temperatures for experiments because this gas can be chilled to temperatures near absolute zero. According to the American Physical Society, most helium in the U.S. is used in industry and in cooling the magnets in MRI machines.