

Updates on Old Wives Tales

There is a whole range of stories surrounding the topic of pregnancy. These myths or old wives tales as some would call them, ensure that you are kept on your toes throughout the entire pregnancy period.

Hear from our experts to ascertain those that you can simply dismiss.



You can't take medication during pregnancy.

NOT TRUE: Many women refuse to take medication during pregnancy for fear of possible adverse effects. Often, they would rather "endure" the symptoms. Common examples include "flu" and "vomiting".

While it is generally agreed that vomiting is a common symptom of early pregnancy, severe vomiting may lead to dehydration, which can be harmful to the general health of the woman. In certain cases

of upper respiratory infection, a course of antibiotics may be necessary. If left untreated, it may occasionally lead on to chest infection (pneumonia). Similarly, bladder infection should be treated. Untreated bladder infection may result in infection to the kidneys, and may increase the risk of premature labour.

Women may also stop medication on their own for an underlying condition once they are pregnant, without the doctor's advice. Examples include asthma, thyroid and

high blood pressure medication. If the underlying condition is not controlled, it may have a negative impact on the pregnancy such as increased risk of miscarriages and poor growth.

Therefore, don't play doctor and consult your healthcare provider to find out what's safe to take.

— Dr Watt Wing Fong, Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Raffles Women Centre



It is unsafe to undergo hair colouring during pregnancy.

NOT TRUE: Hair colouring is generally safe for pregnant women. There have been no known harmful effects of dye or chemicals entering the pregnant mother's body through the skin or hair due to hair dyeing.

However, do take note of the following:

- Wear gloves when handling the hair dye
- Clean off any dye that gets onto the skin immediately
- Do not leave the hair dye on longer than the recommended duration
- Wash off the hair dye thoroughly with water & shampoo
- Opt for natural hair dyes if possible

In addition, stick to the brand of dye that you have used before. This is to minimise the possibility of developing an allergic reaction, which would require treatment with drugs such as steroids. You should also read the instructions that come with the dye and ensure that there is no warning against its use during pregnancy.

— *Dr Chow Kah Kiong, Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Raffles Women Centre*

You shouldn't fly.

NOT TRUE: Generally, commercial air travel poses no special risks to a healthy pregnant woman or her baby. The main concern for the airline is the likelihood of the pregnant woman going into labour whilst flying as this would potentially require a costly diversion and inconvenience to other passengers.

Most airlines are willing to accept pregnant passengers up to 35-36 weeks. Most also require a doctor's letter from 28 weeks onwards. These two criteria vary amongst the different airlines. Further evaluation is required if there have been complications during the pregnancy, before the journey.

It is also prudent to find out what health care facilities are available at the destination and whether your travel insurance would cover for the cost of any complications of the pregnancy requiring medical input or evacuation.

Some tips on the aircraft:

- Take short walks along the aisles every 30mins if it is safe to do so.
- Do stretches and isometric leg exercises.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Sit closer to the lavatory.
- Seatbelts should be worn low around

the pelvis, throughout the flight.

- Avoid gas producing food and airline food. Try to bring your own food if your airline allows.

— *Dr Mohamed Faizal, Family Physician at Raffles Medical's Terminal 3 Medical Centre*

Your gums bleed easily during pregnancy. Bumps or swellings on the gums are mainly due to hormonal changes and not something you should worry over excessively.

NOT TRUE: The change that affects women the most is pregnancy gingivitis. This is a condition whereby the hormones in the bloodstream cause the gums to become more sensitive to food and bacteria that naturally live in the mouth. This makes the gums more inflamed and bleed easily upon brushing. In some women this is quite mild and they may not notice it. However, in others, the inflammation can be quite marked and become painful if left unchecked. This can lead on to benign growths known as pregnancy tumours.

Overwhelming clinical evidence has also shown that gum disease during pregnancy can lead to premature, low birth weight babies.

During pregnancy, it is ideal to visit your dentist, especially in the second trimester to ensure that your routine has been adequate. A cleaning and gum treatment at this time is ideal to prevent pregnancy gingivitis.

— *Dr Rachel Chan, Specialist in Dental Surgery, Raffles Dental*

The leakage of water is a signal that you would go into labour soon. However, the labour process could be very long and you should only go to the hospital if you experience contractions.

NOT TRUE: Some women think that they should only go to the hospital if they experience contractions. They fail to realise that it is possible for the water bag to be leaking without going into labour. The danger of that is that there is an increased risk of infection once the water bag leaks. Once infection sets in, the baby may be affected. Sometimes women may not know if it is urinary leakage or amniotic fluid leakage.

When in doubt, one should always confirm with their doctor.

— *Dr Karolyn Goh, Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Raffles Women Centre*

Epidurals are dangerous as the mother may suffer long-term damage like paralysis, rheumatism and backache.

NOT TRUE: The use of epidural analgesia for pain relief in labour is very safe, and the risk of any complications from it is very low.

If a woman in labour is unable to cope with the labour pains using other methods of pain management, then having an epidural is an effective method to relieve her pain. The pain relief it provides can last throughout labour, however long the duration of labour is.

— *Dr Lee I Wuen, Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Raffles Women Centre*

Post delivery, you are not to take a bath for one month (i.e. during your confinement period).

NOT TRUE: In my opinion, you can take a bath as long as there is no open wound. Since hygiene is the reason for bathing, do take note of the following:

- Bathe when necessary i.e. not too frequently
- Bathe with warm water at 37 degrees Celsius i.e. similar to our body temperature
- Use some herbal water to bath to avoid catching the cold and damp. It could also help with blood circulation
- Keep the bathing process short, within five to ten minutes
- Dry and dress up immediately to avoid catching a cold

If the wound is still healing, it is recommended to use a warm damp towel to freshen up instead of bathing, to prevent infection.

— *Ms Jin Jinhua, Consultant Acupuncturist, Raffles Chinese Medicine*

You should not breastfeed a toddler during pregnancy, as that would affect the new baby who needs all the nourishment it can get.

NOT TRUE: As long as a woman is healthy, breastfeeding during pregnancy won't harm her, the foetus, or her toddler. However, a doctor may recommend that a pregnant woman not breastfeed, if she has a nutritional deficiency, is underweight, or is at risk for pre-term labour. **HN**

— *Dr Jazlan Joosop, Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Raffles Women Centre*