



Health & Safety / Health

Old Wives' Tales Revealed & Week in Review



Dear Debi,

What's the truth when it comes to commonly held beliefs about child care?

Debi's Tips



Debi Gutierrez

Host

Although sometimes there may be a small grain of truth, most old wives' tales are completely false.

WEEK IN REVIEW

And don't forget about the great things that we learned this week:

- [Following Your Child's Lead](#)
- [Agreeing on Behavior Management](#)
- [Breastfeeding](#)
- [A Man in Your Child's Life](#)

Expert Advice



Dr. Michael Bryant

Pediatrician

You may have heard that if a pregnant woman is carrying her baby low, she's sure to have a boy. This is actually a myth, or an old wives' tale. There are many commonly held beliefs about child-rearing that aren't exactly true. Which are completely false and which have some truth to them?

Old Wives' Tale:

Sucking your thumb or giving your baby a pacifier will give them buckteeth.

Not true. If a child is sucking his or her thumb and pushing on the teeth, then that can help produce an overbite, so there's an element of truth to it, but in general, the answer is no - sucking your thumb is not going to produce problems. There is nothing in the literature that suggests that it will cause them to have misalignment of their teeth or problems later.

Old Wives' Tale:

If you don't cover a baby's face when you take her out in the cold, she'll swallow air and get a lot of gas.

There's always a slight element of truth to some of these old wives' tales. It is true that

babies swallow air. There's nothing about cold air or warm air that's any different. Babies will swallow air, it'll distend their stomach, and, yes, it can produce gas, but you don't need to cover your child's face. In fact, it really annoys babies when you cover their faces. They like sucking on bottles and doing those kinds of things, but when you put things over their face, it just irritates them and makes them agitated.

Old Wives' Tale:

If you pick up your baby all the time, you will spoil him.

I hear this a lot. The important thing for caregivers to recognize is there is a natural bonding process that occurs between a child and a parent or caregiver. Mothers very quickly understand what cries mean a child is hungry, what cries mean a child wants to be picked up. No, you can't spoil your child by picking them up. In fact, what you're doing is just nurturing them, comforting them, creating that bond that naturally exists between a mom or a caregiver and a child. So, no, it's not true that you're going to spoil your child. Very young children are not that deceptive. It's not like they're doing anything sinister so they're trying to manipulate you in order to pick them up. They're simply looking for their basic needs to be met.

Old Wives' Tale:

Drinking milk when you are sick will create phlegm.

I've heard this a lot. In fact, many parents cut out the milk, especially when their child has a cold. Again there's nothing in the literature that says that milk is going to cause phlegm. If you think about it, if milk is the primary source of calories for your child and your child is sick and now you deny them of that energy, then you deny them of the fuel that's going to help them recover from their illness. So please don't restrict those calories from your child. Give them those calories and give them their milk. Allow their bodies to heal naturally. Milk will help them do that.

Old Wives' Tale:

Walkers will ruin the way a child learns how to walk.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is very clear about the use of walkers. They actually strongly advise us not to encourage parents to use them. For instance, let's say you have a 9-month-old that you put in a walker thinking that's going to help him or her learn how to walk. If the child happens upon a flight of stairs, there's nothing in that child's mind that tells them that there's any danger, so as they go along in the walker gleefully, and approach stairs they are now in a trap as they fall down the stairs. So we are really quite vehement about telling parents not to use walkers at all. Walkers don't enhance your child's ability to walk. In fact, they can be a real trap for accidents. I would advise all parents and caregivers to get rid of their walkers.

Old Wives' Tale:

Special walking shoes are necessary to straighten a child's feet and teach him how to walk.

Special walking shoes are not necessary. Let me just explain something about children learning to walk. It's a natural process. It's natural for your child's feet to in-toe a bit.

Why? Because the bones are sort of soft and they bow. As the bones get stronger and as your child grows older - usually about the age of 3 and 4 - the feet naturally straighten out. The interesting thing about special walking shoes is that parents think the shoes magically did it. But if you had done nothing, their child's feet would have naturally straightened all by themselves. So it's sort of perpetuated the myth that somehow special shoes are indeed corrective, when in fact, the natural course is that they would have gotten better all by themselves.

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