

Customs about Pregnancy Around the World

Universal Common Cultural Concerns of Pregnancy

- Fear of a negative outcome of the pregnancy.
- Fear of damage to either mother or baby where prevention strategies can be practiced (diet, exercise, rest, etc.).
- Wish for the baby to be healthy and to thrive.

Africa

- A pregnant woman is not supposed to hold her hands up over her head, it is believed she will strangle the baby
- Pregnancy is not celebrated, it is believed that witches and evil spirits are capable of stealing the pregnancy or interfering with it
- Pregnant women are not allowed to mix with known witches or allow strangers to rub her stomach
- If a pregnant woman is unmarried the pregnancy is considered taboo; these women are taunted not only by strangers, but by their own families and friends.
- Pregnant women will not accept any gifts, or celebrate the infant until the birth of the infant. It is believed that to accept gifts and to celebrate the infant before the birth will incur the angers of the gods and the ancestors. As a result, the child will either be born dead or deformed.
- Africans believe that ancestors return to their loved ones through the birth of new infants

Babylonian Jewish Customs

- The parents of a pregnant woman are to send her a tray of sweets and small items of jewelry.
- A pregnant woman is to be given all the food she desires.
- A pregnant woman is not allowed to scratch, because scratching will cause birth marks.
- During her seventh month of pregnancy, a woman starts to make baby clothes.
- When a woman reaches her ninth month of pregnancy, her mother sends her ten kilograms of rice, one rooster, and two hens (hen for easy birth; rooster for a boy; hen for a girl; rice cooked with pieces of chicken, almonds and raisins is sent to friends and family).
- Rice is cooked and given to the poor.

Estonian Villages (Black Sea Coast in Caucasus in Estonia, Ingria, & Mordvinia)

- Pregnant women are allowed to attend weddings and funerals.
- If a pregnant woman is startled, she could have a premature baby, a stuttering or backward child, or a child with eye disease.
- Pregnant women are to avoid alcohol in order to avoid birth defects.
- If a pregnant woman kicks a cat or a dog she will have a hairy child.
- If a pregnant woman weaves linen she may have a child with bandy legs or facial marks on its face.
- Pregnant women are not to make baby clothes so that nothing will happen to the baby.
- If a pregnant woman's belly is wide, she will have a girl.
- If a pregnant woman's belly is pointed, she will have a boy.
- Some believe that a pregnant woman with a clear complexion will have a daughter and a changed face means she will have a son; others in the same villages said the opposite was true.

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China

- If a pregnant woman's abdomen shape is pointed, (especially in the first three months of pregnancy), she will have a boy.
- If a pregnant woman's abdomen shape is rounded, (especially in the first three months of pregnancy), she will have a girl.
- To avoid complications and deformity, a pregnant woman is not to use glue, a hammer or nails.
- Pregnant women are not to walk barefoot.
- Pregnant women should sleep with knives under their bed to ward off evil spirits
- If a pregnant woman eats pale foods, that baby will be fair-skinned
- Pregnant Chinese women should never attend funerals or have sex
- Exposure to computers, microwaves and cell phones can lead to miscarriage or birth defect.
- It is very bad for pregnant women to gossip or laugh loudly
- For the pregnancy to be successful the husband should carry his wife over burning coal when entering the house.
- Reading of good literature during pregnancy has positive effect on the unborn child.
- It is very bad for the pregnant woman to gossip or laugh loudly.
- There is a belief that no construction work should be done in the house where there is a pregnant woman.
- The Chinese have something what is called "tsue shen" (hastening delivery). It is a package of clothes sent by maternal grandmother to her daughter about one month before it is expected the baby to be born. The white cloth inside the package is used to wrap the newborn baby.
- To somehow ease the pain of labor Chinese women usually drink special herbal potion.
- In China women often give birth to their child in an armchair or futon.
- After the baby is born woman makes a ritual offering of sweet meat and incense to the goddess who helped her to conceive.
- The period immediately after the baby is born is called the "sitting month". It is said that a woman is "doing the month". During this period the woman stays at home and usually her mother-in-law helps her.
- It is believed that due to blood loss during the birth of the baby a woman is in "cold phase". That is why she should stay in warm place. Living in this phase also includes avoiding cold or raw food.

In the Quran

- Pregnancy is considered a burden to the woman.
- Pregnancy is considered a beautiful time.
- Pregnancy is considered a time of physical risk.

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Hispanic cultures (Central American, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Spanish)

- Pregnancy is desired soon after marriage.
- The pregnant woman is strongly influenced by her mother-in-law.
- Pregnancy is regarded as an important family event.
- Pregnant women are encouraged to avoid heavy work and harmful activities such as smoking, drinking, or drug use.
- Pregnant women are to rest frequently, walk, eat well, and get plenty of sleep.
- It is common for grandmothers to move in during the last weeks of pregnancy and for weeks following the birth.
- Unsatisfied cravings cause birthmarks.
- The presence of the mother or mother-in-law is preferred over the husband during labor and delivery.
- A pregnant woman exposed to an eclipse will cause the infant to have a cleft lip or palate.
- If a pregnant woman's belly is pointed, that baby will be a boy
- If a pregnant woman's belly spreads out to the sides, the baby will be a girl
- A pregnant woman should carry a key or a safety pin to protect herself
- If a Jamaican pregnant woman drink a lot of milk, her child is going to have a lighter complexion
- Pregnant women won't let anyone they don't know or trust touch their pregnant belly
- Pregnant women won't reveal how far along they are in their pregnancy, and there especially cautious around anyone who may be hold a grudge, they believe sharing this information puts them at risk for birth complications or an ugly child

India

- Twins and other multiple pregnancies may be viewed as unlucky
- Pregnant women of lower socioeconomic classes are still required to fulfill duties like carry heavy loads and other household chores.
- The placenta may be disposed of by burying it under the floor of the room the birth occurred
- "Hot" foods are harmful while "cold foods are beneficial
- Pregnant women should remain inside the house during an eclipse or their babies will be born with a harelip or other deformity
- During the seventh month of pregnancy Hindu first time moms engage in the "Godh Bharna" celebration. At the celebration the mother and mother-in-law of the mum-to-be fill her sari with items symbolizing good omens like a coconut marked with a red swastika, moong (split bean), supari (betel nut) and silver coins.
- Many Indian new moms use their sari to bind their stomach after delivery. This binding is also believed to promote good posture during breastfeeding, reposition the womb and eliminate stretch marks.

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Japan

- After the fifth month of pregnancy, the woman will wear a cotton abdomen band called an “Iwata-obi.” It is given by her family for protection, good luck and an easy birth.
- Her family will care her for one month after which she will return to her husband with the child.
- Pregnant women should not eat spicy or salty foods. eating sweet foods will hinder the baby's bone formation and that spicy foods will unsettle the baby's soul; and that sour foods will harm the baby's skin.
- Eating raw fish is forbidden
- To avoid the birthmarks on a baby's body, the pregnant women should not look at fire
- When the baby's umbilical cord falls off, it is saved in a wooden box, called a heso. This is symbol of the mother and child's relationship for the past, present and future.
- Some Japanese believe childbirth is a natural process that no pain relief should be administered. Keeping with this, delivering mothers are taught not to scream or yell during labor, but apparently grunting is acceptable.
- To encourage breastfeeding, mochi (sticky rice cake) is believed to increase lactation.
- Pregnant women should clean their toilet daily for a healthy and good looking baby.
- If a pregnant woman looks at fire their child will be born with a birthmark.
- Pregnant women are discouraged from eating any seafood with claws such as crabs or lobsters because it is was believed it will cause the child to become a thief.
- Ginger root is also forbidden because the baby may grow extra fingers or toes that protrude like the fingers of the root.

Ireland

- Pregnant women are not to enter a graveyard... she might twist her foot on a grave and cause her baby to be born with a club foot.
- Pregnant women are not to be in a house with a corpse.
- Pregnant women are to avoid hares. To avoid having a baby with a hare-lip a pregnant woman should tear the hem of her clothes or catch the hare and tear its ear if she sees one.
- Pregnant women should wear a medal of their patron saint to protect them from evil
- Pregnant women should avoid cats since they are believed that they could steal your baby's soul
- Pregnant women should eat lots of carrots to help prevent their child from having to ever wear glasses
- Eating green potatoes would cause birth defects

Russia

- For some Russian women, prenatal care is expected only when the pregnant woman feels that something is wrong.
- Pregnant women are often protected from bad news which is believed to be harmful to the baby.
- During the last trimester, pregnant women are to avoid lifting heavy objects such as chairs or Boxes and exercising, such as jumping or jogging. These activities are believed to potentially harm the baby. For example, the umbilical cord could wrap around the baby and choke it or the baby could move to the breech position or become past due.

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Southeast Asian cultures (Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong and Vietnamese)

- The first trimester of pregnancy is considered a ‘cold’ state. Women are recommended to eat ‘hot’ foods, including ginger and black pepper and to avoid ‘cold’ foods, including lemon, melon, pineapple, spinach and green papaya. In the second trimester, which is considered a ‘neutral’ state, women may be allowed to eat these foods. In the third trimester, which is considered a ‘hot’ state, women may decrease the amount of food they consume and avoid taking natural supplements.
- Pregnant women remain physically active during pregnancy, but usually avoid strenuous work.
- Pregnancy women may believe that edema is a normal condition during pregnancy and may not seek medical attention.
- Pregnant women may view ante-partum bleeding as normal. They call it ‘bleeding to wash the baby’s face’ and believe that it stops without medical intervention.
- Pregnant women commonly believe that sleeping during the day or waking up late may result in large fetus.
- Some pregnant women may believe that sitting in a door frame or on a step may cause obstructive labor.
- It is often believed that sexual intercourse during pregnancy can cause fetal illness and abnormalities.
- Pregnant women may regularly use traditional plant medicines and herbal tonics to maintain their own and fetal health and to stimulate labor.

A few other cultures

- Balinese babies: after birth, the baby’s feet must not touch the ground for the first 1-5 days. You won’t catch any Balinese mommies- to-be eating octopus—doing so allegedly brings about difficult deliveries.
- Pakistan: days before the birth of the baby, the mother moves out of the home and into a building called the Bashleni, it is painted with animals and contains a shrine to the goddess of birth, Dezalik.
- Portuguese women cannot cuddle with their furry pet while pregnant, their unborn child could become hairy. People in Portugal believe that if the pregnant woman wants to give birth to a baby girl she should eat round fruits and vegetables. If she would like to get a baby boy then she should eat long vegetables like carrots or cucumbers.
- Bolivia—Knitting while pregnant is believed to cause the umbilical cord to wrap around the baby’s neck
- In Mongolia it is believed that when meeting two pregnant women should not touch each other. Locals believe that baby’s sex can be changed that way. Until the child is 3 months or in some cases even over 1 year old people do not directly mention his or her sex. There is a belief that by doing so people will confuse evil spirits.
- In Spain there is a superstition that a fontanel on baby’s head can be damaged as result of loud noises. There is also rather strange belief that a piece of wet paper put on baby’s forehead can cure hiccups.