

Cultural EXCHANGE

A woman's pregnancy and childbirth experience often depend on where she comes from and the ancient traditions and cultural beliefs that shape her. Do any of these run in your family?

BY LISA EVANS



PROTECTING BABY

Many Latin American and European countries share a belief in the "evil eye" – the power of an envious person to cause harm to a pregnant woman or her baby. For this reason, pregnant women in Cuba won't allow strangers to touch their bellies.

In some parts of Mexico, babies are given amber bracelets that are thought to ward off evil spirits; while in Greece, a "mati" – a small blue stone with a black eye in the centre – may be hung near a baby's crib.



In Panama, babies are dressed in red, a colour thought to keep the evil eye at bay.

CELEBRATIONS

In India, guests gather around the seventh month (when the fetus is said to be viable) to participate in a bangles ceremony. Guests place bangles on the hands of the pregnant woman, delivering blessings for a safe delivery and a healthy child.

Egyptian parents throw a "sebou" seven days after the birth of a baby. It's during this ceremony that the baby receives his or her name. The number seven is considered lucky to Egyptians. In the seventh month of pregnancy, the expectant mother's parents prepare seven sets of clothes as gifts for the baby.



PREGNANCY SUPERSTITIONS

In Bolivia, pregnant women are urged not to knit as it's believed this action can cause the umbilical cord to wrap around the baby's neck.

Japanese women are encouraged not to eat any seafood with claws such as crabs or lobsters while pregnant as it's believed this will cause the unborn child to become a thief.

Mexican women are urged to avoid all contact with anything death-related while pregnant including funerals, burials or cemeteries, as these are thought to cause miscarriage.

In China, mothers-to-be are encouraged to eat only cold foods. Since pregnancy is considered a "hot" condition, cold foods are required to balance the scale between "hot and cold" or "yin and yang".

In many parts of Latin America, it's believed if a pregnant woman does not eat a food she craves, her baby will be born with a birthmark in the shape of the craved food.

Read how Canadians are helping Ugandan moms at ParentsCanada.com/shantihouse

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BIRTH

While most expectant moms in Holland use a midwife rather than an obstetrician, those who do opt for a hospital birth are unlikely to get an epidural as these are usually given out only if it's convenient for the anesthesiologist's schedule (hence the Dutch joke about the "9-to-5 epidural").

In Korea, a woman is urged to look only at beautiful things as seeing ugly things during labour will mean the baby will be born ugly. Screaming or shouting during labour is also considered shameful. A woman is expected to be quiet through the birth as it's believed silence is required to focus the energy into the birthing process.

In China, labouring women are also expected to be silent as loud noises are said to call the attention of evil spirits.



POST-BIRTH

In China, the placenta is buried near the baby's birth place so that in death it may be worn into heaven.

Korean parents bury the placenta close to home if they want more children, but if the family doesn't want any more children, the placenta is buried far from the family home.

In Latin America and parts of Europe, it's common for women and their newborns to remain in their homes for 40 days post-birth for fear of exposing the baby to cold, wind, and germs. o

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