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Cold and Flu Old Wives' Tales

By Rosemary Black, Marguerite Lamb, and Laura Flynn McCarthy

When it comes to colds, flu, stomach bugs, and ear infections, everyone has a theory. Some have been passed down through generations, or are based on outdated science. A few just seem like common sense. But whatever their origin, many just aren't true. The facts behind these myths:

"Feed a cold, starve a fever."

The truth: This centuries-old saying, popularized by Mark Twain, simply isn't so. All sick kids (and adults) — whether they've got a cold, fever, or both — need nutrients and liquids to get better, says Leigh Ann Greavu, a dietitian in St. Paul. If your child doesn't feel like eating solids, then chicken noodle soup, juice, and even ice cream are good alternatives.

"Greenish mucus means your child has something worse than a cold."

The truth: Not usually. While clear mucus is most common, green or yellow snot can also just be symptoms of a cold. However, discolored mucus plus a persistent high fever, decreased appetite, cough, or severe nasal congestion may be signs of a bacterial infection, which — unlike a cold — could require antibiotics. If you notice your child often has green or yellow mucus, there may be an underlying problem (enlarged adenoids, for instance) that's causing recurring bacterial infections. In that case, let your pediatrician be your sleuth.

"Colds and flu are most contagious before symptoms appear."

The truth: They spread most easily when symptoms are at their worst. That's because these infections are commonly passed through coughed-up or sneezed-out droplets containing the virus, or via hand-to-hand contact. While the likelihood of catching (or passing) something peaks when kids are most miserable, the risk persists as long as the drip does. So even if your kid's almost over it, give the other moms in your playgroup a heads up; they may decide to take a rain check.



"It's best not to treat mild fevers."

The truth: It depends on how your child's feeling. Fevers do help fight infections by stimulating the immune system and killing bacteria and viruses that can't survive at higher-than-normal temperatures. But that's no reason to let your child be miserable. Try to strike a balance between keeping him comfortable and letting his body do its job, says Daniel Levy, M.D., clinical assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore. If he has a mild fever but seems especially cranky, lethargic, or in pain, giving him the right dose of acetaminophen or ibuprofen will likely make him feel (and sleep) better. If he's reasonably happy and energetic

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even though his temperature is 102 degrees, keeping an eye on him may be enough (just make sure he's well hydrated). The exception: Any fever in an infant under 6 months merits a call to the doc at once.

"The B.R.A.T. diet is best for diarrhea."

The truth: A regimen of bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast used to be the standard prescription for thickening watery stools. While they work great, a plate full of rice, with banana for dessert, isn't always appealing to a sick kid. "Your child will feel better faster if you feed him what he'll actually eat," says Andrea McCoy, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics at Temple University in Philadelphia. (Just avoid spicy and greasy foods and fruit juice.)

"Don't kiss your baby if you have a cold."

The truth: A peck on the lips probably won't hurt, says Neil Schachter, M.D., author of *The Good Doctor's Guide to Colds & Flu*. Unlike a sneeze or a cough, which bring forth viral-rich fluids from your airways, the saliva hanging out in your mouth harbors very little cold virus — so it's surprisingly hard to pass the illness through kissing. The best way to keep your baby from catching your cold: Wash your hands often.

"Colds cause ear infections."

The truth: It does seem that way, but all colds are caused by viruses, while 90 percent of ear infections are caused by bacteria. So, why does your child seem to get an ear infection every time he has a cold? "Colds create mucus and fluid buildup in the ear tubes — a perfect environment for ear infection-causing bacteria to grow," says Ari Brown, M.D., coauthor of *Toddler 411: Clear Answers and Smart Advice for Your Toddler*.

It's true!

It turns out Mother did know best about these two old standards:

• If your child drinks something hot or cold before you take his oral temperature, it won't be accurate. This one's on the money, according to a recent study at the University of Virginia Health System. If your child's just had a cup of tea, a bowl

of soup, or an ice pop, wait about half an hour before giving him an oral thermometer.

• If your child gets chilled, he might catch cold. For decades, scientists have been saying there's no evidence for this. Well, now there is. Last year, researchers in Wales tested the age-old wisdom that being cold can bring on a cold. They found that those people whose feet they chilled for 20 minutes were significantly more likely to develop a cold over the next few days than those whose tootsies stayed warm and toasty. Chilling a person lowers immunity, explain the researchers. So if your child is already carrying a virus, his body will be less able to fight it off. And it's not just cold feet, says Ronald Eccles, Ph.D., lead author on the study — wet hair and soggy clothes likely dampen immunity, too. *Parenting, November 2006*

Imagination and Storytelling Go Hand in Hand

5 Imagination boosting storytelling starters to help tell a story together

By Melody Warnick

Lots of preschoolers are natural-born storytellers — and their burgeoning vocabularies make it easier for them to tell more complex tales. Try these imagination-boosting story starters:

1. Make your child the main character. The plots can be true to life — "One morning, Alex had his favorite cereal in a special bowl" — or spiced up — "One morning, Alex found a strange animal next to his cereal bowl." When he gets the hang of it, he can take over.
2. Keep the ball rolling. When your child tells you about his day at preschool (or his trip to outer space) prompt him: "What happened next?" or "What color was your spaceship?"
3. Let him fill in the blanks. Start a story, then pause at a pivotal moment ("and the tiger liked to eat...") to let your child jump in. The whole family can help — give everyone 30 seconds or so to move the narrative along.

4. Go outside the lines. Instead of sticking to the text in your child's picture book, help him create a whole new story based on the artwork.

5. Tell your own tales. Recounting your childhood can help your preschooler handle his problems. And the more he hears your stories, the better he'll learn how to construct his own. *Parenting, March 2006*

Girls' Night In

Stay in with your girlfriends and have a kid- and husband-free night

By the editors of Parenting

Instead of the same old dinner out with friends, get together at home — yours or a pal's:

Wine tastings. The hostess picks a wine (say, merlot) and everyone brings a bottle, plus cheese and crackers. *Parenting* staffer Lisa Bain and her friends set a price limit — no more than \$15. "It's a fun way to learn more about wine," she says. For some guidance, check out Winemag.com's free database of 35,000 reviews, searchable by rating, price, and varietal or blend. (Registration's required, but avoid e-mail by declining updates.)

Clothing swaps. Everyone brings a bag full of clothes they no longer want (nothing ratty or stained) and goes "shopping" among their friends' stuff. Whatever's left over at the end of the night goes to charity. If you don't all wear similar sizes, include accessories such as purses and costume jewelry.

Craft nights. "My friends and I go to one of our houses and bring our current project, whether we're knitting or just organizing vacation photos," says Courtenay Wells, mom of a 4-year-old in Lafayette, IN. "We have a blast and do something useful."

Pie parties. "Each person brings a different type of pie or ice cream," says Lauren Haller, a mom of three, ages 8, 6 and 2, in Scarsdale, NY. This is ideal for moms who can't commit a whole night to dinner. Bonus: Your family will love the leftovers! *Parenting, October 2006*