

SOME COMMON CHILD HEALTH MYTHS

MYTH 1: *Fever is a common symptom of teething.*

FACT: We know from older children that erupting teeth can cause pain, but teething is not an explanation for any fever of significance. Certainly, the first two years of life are when children have many viral illnesses and it is also when twenty teeth erupt. So teething and a fever may occur at the same time, but the teething does not cause the fever.

MYTH 2: *A high fever can cause brain damage.*

FACT: Fever is a sign of illness, most likely a viral infection, but the fever itself does not cause damage to the brain. The high fever makes your child uncomfortable and for that reason, we recommend fever-reducers to bring the temperature down. A dose of acetaminophen or ibuprofen usually bring a fever down two to three degrees for the four to eight hour period that they are effective, but then might have to be given again. Parents often worry about the possibility of a seizure with a high fever. A fever seizure may occur with a sudden temperature spike, but the risk is low. An uncomplicated fever seizure also does not cause brain damage or any even a seizure disorder.

MYTH 3: *Iron-fortified formula causes constipation.*

FACT: DO NOT change your baby's formula without discussing it with the doctor first. Constipation is hard, ball or log like stools and is not caused by the needed iron added to baby formulas. Iron is an important building block for many tissues and organs, including the brain. During the first year, as a baby grows very rapidly, iron stores are rapidly used up. Breast milk and iron-fortified formula provide this iron during the first six months. After this time, additional sources of iron such as those found in baby foods must be added.

MYTH 4: *Not wearing a coat, going outside with wet hair, and cold weather are causes of the common cold.*

FACT: The common cold is caused by exposure to people who are infected with the many viruses that cause this colds. Colds or upper respiratory infections are more common in the winter because children (and adults) spend more time indoors in small, crowded spaces such as classrooms and playrooms. Careful hand washing is the best way to prevent transmission of germs.

MYTH 5: *Ear infections are caused by not wearing a hat or getting water in the ear.*

FACT: Middle ear infections are most often a complication of upper respiratory infections or colds. These viral infections cause swelling of the throat area that connects to the middle ear, preventing the middle ear space from draining enough. Exposure to cold air or water in the outer ear canal does not cause this type of ear infection. However, an outer ear infection or "swimmer's ear" can develop from exposure of the outer ear canal to pool, pond or ocean water which changes the normal balance of bacteria on the skin lining the ear canal.

MYTH 6: *When your child has a cold, he/she should not drink milk because it causes more mucus to be produced.*

FACT: Plenty of fluids, including milk are recommended for children with colds. If your child prefers milk, there is no reason to restrict it as long as the intake doesn't exceed recommended amounts for the age.

MYTH 7: *Good parents buy expensive special walking shoes for their toddlers.*

FACT: The purpose of shoes in this age group is to protect the feet from wet, cold and injury. Children develop their walking skills best by walking barefoot when possible. When shoes are required, they should be cheap, and have a flexible sole and provide room to grow-

MYTH 8: *Children with ear infections should not travel on airplanes.*

FACT: Fluid in the middle ear space actually protects against the pain caused by variations in air pressure- No need to cancel that trip to Florida because of a recent ear infection! Sucking and swallowing on the breast, bottle or juice box during take off and landing will help your child without fluid in the middle ear space deal with air travel.

MYTH 9: *Allowing your infant to bear weight on their legs will cause bowed legs.*

FACT: Around age two months, many infants love to be held so they can bear some of their weight on their legs. Instead of causing bowed legs, this weight bearing actually straightens and strengthens their legs. The bow-legged appearance of most infants is because of their curled-up position in the uterus.

MYTH 10: *If your child's belly button is an "outie" it is because the obstetrician or midwife cut the cord wrong.*

FACT: An "outie" belly button or umbilical hernia is caused by a small opening in the tissue layer of the abdomen. This hernia almost always closes by age five years without any treatment. Only if it is very large or not closed by age five, a minor surgical repair may be indicated. A "belly band" or taping a silver dollar over the belly button is not helpful.
