Baby myths BUSTED

Parethood is an exciting time, but it can also be mind-boggling. In her work as a women’s health specialist, Brisbane-based GP Dr Pamela Douglas found some of our traditional beliefs around caring for newborns are misleading and tend to create more anxiety for new parents. In her new book, The Unconquered Little Baby Book, Pamela busts some of the myths around caring for babies. “I wanted to take my medical research and write it in a way that was easy to read for exhausted parents who hardly have a moment to themselves,” Pamela says.

**MYTH #1: BABIES CRAY BECAUSE OF TUMMY PAIN**
Pamela says: It’s often suggested to families that their baby is crying because of tummy pain. Parents might even be told the crying relates to bacteria in the baby’s gut. We can’t always work out why a baby is crying and it’s true that the mix of gut bacteria seems to be different in crying babies. But there is no reason to think that the bacteria cause pain.

When babies cry hard, they pull their knees up, turn red in the face and bunch their hands into fists. This isn’t because of pain but because they are upset — even if we don’t know why.

One problem that does cause a lot of pain in breastfed babies is called functional lactose overload. This is just a fancy term for a breastfeeding problem that makes babies cry and fuss. If the baby doesn’t receive enough of the creamy part of the breast milk over a day or two, they may develop fatty DIsthesia stools and tummy pain, which makes them cry. In this instance parents may require the help of their health professional.

**MYTH #2: A STRICT FEED/PLAY/SLEEP ROUTINE IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOOD SLEEP**
Pamela says: It’s normal for the body’s sleep regulators to kick in after a feed and the sleepiness at this time is triggered by satiety and relaxation hormones. Sleepiness at the end of feeds is a powerful biological cue and by ignoring this cue and encouraging baby to play for a while before sleeping — something that some parents are advised to do — interferes with the healthy function of the biological sleep regulators. The sleep may not last for long, but remember, some of the time spent during the day is quite normal for babies.

**MYTH #3: BABIES NEED TO BE TAUGHT HOW TO SLEEP**
Pamela says: Sleep is a normal, biological process, which can’t be forced, and because of this, babies cannot be ‘taught’ to sleep. When infants are under six months of age, evidence shows some strategies, such as strict sleep training, which aim to make babies sleep for longer periods at night, do work. However, this is only by about one less episode of waking every second night and this change in sleep, despite popular advice, does not improve the outcomes for the baby in the short or long term. It also doesn’t help mothers because evidence shows it is not the number of times that a mother wakes that affects her mood, but how quickly she can get back to sleep — that is if she is stressed, she’ll have trouble falling back to sleep.

Telling parents that we have to teach the baby good habits or the baby will have sleep problems later on is not based on evidence. It just makes mothers worried — which interferes with their sleep.

**MYTH #4: YOU SHOULD NOT GET EMOTIONAL WHEN YOUR BABY CRIES**
Pamela says: Feeling upset and anxious when your baby cries and fusses is a perfectly normal response. In fact, when babies cry, our heart rate increases, our blood pressure rises and we want to do everything we can to settle our precious little creature.

These responses are biologicallyhard-wired. Sometimes, no matter what we do, baby won’t settle, and so it is normal for parents to feel upset and despairing. Fortunately, there is a set of psychological strategies that we can use if we have an unsettled baby. Relaxation strategies such as progressive muscular relaxation or deep breathing and mindfulness can all be helpful to reduce stress.

These strategies teach us how not to be pushed around by our own distressed thoughts and feelings, even when the going is tough. The key is to be prepared and know how to use them.

**MYTH #5: BABIES NEED A QUIET AND DARK DAYTIME ENVIRONMENT TO SLEEP**
Pamela says: Many families are told their baby is unsettled because of overstimulation, but this is false. This myth has persisted despite a lack of evidence. During the day sleeping in an area that is light and where the baby can hear the sounds of daily living keeps the circadian clock healthy. Neuroscience research indicates that long periods spent in quiet, dark rooms during the day risk under stimulating baby’s senses.

**TIP**
Parents are the best judges of their own baby’s needs and what makes the baby happiest. If your baby is crying and you’re open-minded and have no problem at anything, it’s important to respond to your baby’s needs to try to set them before bedtime.

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Dr Pamela Douglas, GP and author

**SOLDIER ON**
Members of the Coles Baby & Toddler Club community tell what helped them through the early days with baby.

**BIBLES, BOOKS AND RHYTHMS**
“Tales get me through the early days of when it’s too early to take on and off”
Lara实施

**NATURALIS LUMISOLARIA PINE PAIN PAIN RELIEF**
“After a bath, a pin cushion for my baby’s poor little weary wits”
Rebecca Billing

**INFUSAL WIND DROPS**
“Infusal was a huge relief for both our little”
Evelyn Stork

**GAIH NATURAL DAILY BATH & BODY WASH**
“Battery of products that do wonders for baby’s products”
Katy Butler