

Baby myths BUSTED

With so much conflicting advice out there, it can leave new parents feeling muddled. We talk to Dr Pamela Douglas to set the record straight and uncover common truths about parenting in the early days.

Parenthood 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 even more anxiety for new parents.

Myth #1: BABIES CRY 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 frothy explosive 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, catnapping 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; it is 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 biologically hard-wired. Sometimes, no matter what we do, baby won't settle, and so it is normal for parents to feel very 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.

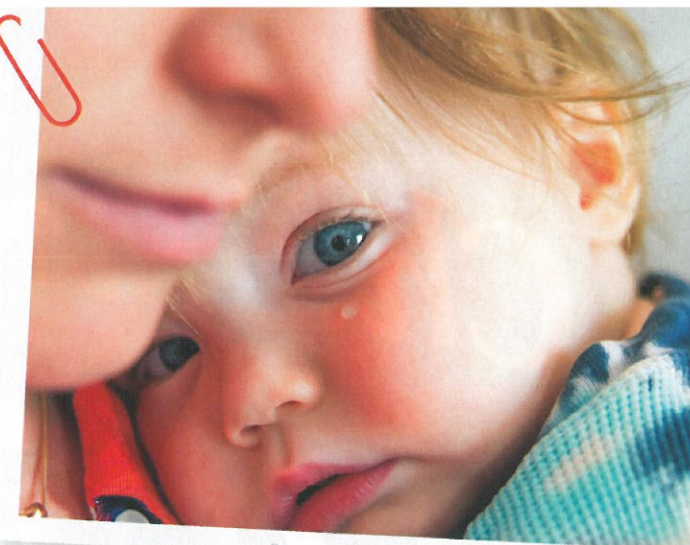
Myth #5: BABIES NEED A QUIET AND DARK DAYTIME ENVIRONMENT TO SLEEP

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.

“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.”

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.



BONDS WONDERSUITS
“These got me through those early days as they're so easy to take on and off!”
Lana Adele Wood



NATRALUS NATURAL PAW PAW BABY OINTMENT, 75G
“This ointment was a lifesaver for my baby boy's nasty nappy rash.”
Rebecca Billing



INFACOL WIND DROPS
“Infacol was a huge relief for both our bubs.”
Emma Soar



GAIA NATURAL BABY BATH & BODY WASH
“Nappies, wipes and Gaia's range of baby products!”
Kristy Butler

TIP

Parents are the best judges of their own babies and you will naturally figure out what works for your child. Keep an open mind, avoid quick fixes and if something works for your family, stick to it if you truly believe in it.