



BEING CONSCIOUS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN INDIA



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PREGNANCY

- Indian families do not like to announce the pregnancy for the first three months fearing the “Evil Eye” or due to the risk of miscarriage in the early days.
- Women tend to prefer female doctors and allied health professionals for modest reasons and prefer not to be exposed during the antenatal visits.
- Some families prefer the traditional and rooted forms of alternative medicines like Ayurveda, flower-backed medicines, homeopathy, etc, as opposed to allopathy for their supplementary requirements in pregnancy.
- Elders in the family encourage the mothers to eat more as they believe she has to eat for two; consequently, they end up increasing quantity rather than nutrition.
- The concept of hot food vs cold food is practiced. Traditional healing methods believe that the woman's body during pregnancy has more heat generated and avoid eating foods that are considered hot like papaya, mango, pineapple, jackfruit, etc out of fear in that the foetus could get aborted.
- Food items considered cold like citrus fruits are avoided by the pregnant women so that she does not fall sick.
- Muslim women are given the choice of fasting during Ramadan depending on their health and the wellbeing of the foetus and their ability to cope with the fast.
- There are specific functions/ceremonies (baby shower) done at various stages of the pregnancy for the expecting mother to help her feel loved by her family.
- Due to the preference towards male offsprings and the prevalence of abortion of female foetus, Indian government has made it illegal to determine the gender of the baby.

DURING BIRTH

- Elders in the family might insist on babies being born at a certain time or day based on astrology and other calculations done by their preists.
- Traditional methods like acupressure and flower-backed remedies are preferred to help labour progress and for those who want to have a natural birth.
- Some families have the mindset that the husband should not be present with the mother during labour, and the expecting mother's mother accompanies her during labour and immediate postpartum to care for her.
- There are tribal customs of burning the placenta and umbilical cord which is practiced.
- Energy healing for women in labour is believed to help them cope with the pain and have a natural birth.
- The doula or support persons should be mindful of mothers who are particular about their modesty and hijab during childbirth and help them achieve it.
- Mothers might prefer to listen religious chants or recitations during labour to help them remain calm.
- Muslims have the tradition of reciting the call for prayer in the ear of the baby as soon as he/she is born. They also soften dates and rub it on the gums of the baby.

POSTPARTUM CARE

- Some traditions prefer to isolate the mother and baby after birth for various reasons, like the mother needing more rest, giving her time to heal, or because they consider the mother to be impure and needing to keep her away from the newborn.
- Elders sometimes tell women not to feed colostrum to the baby as they believe it to be impure milk.
- Low economic societies tend to give cow's milk to the young infant if the mother is having a low milk supply since they cannot afford formula.
- There are specific traditional foods which are given to mothers to help them heal from birth and lactate better. However, these have to be carefully administered to ensure they do not contain galactagogues which might lead to engorgement or mastitis for the mother.
- Most Indian families do not prefer pictures of their newborn babies to be taken or shared on social media as they associate it with causing harm to the baby.
- The Evil Eye is something many families strongly believe in and have their own means of warding off evil to protect the child.