



#1. You shouldn't begin a new exercise routine when you're pregnant

myth busters

Finally—what to heed, and what to give the heave-ho to

While science—and common sense—have debunked most pregnancy myths, some have a long shelf-life, whether warranted or not. We went to the experts to shed light on the most common myths: what's total bunk, what's partially true, and even what's dead-on right.

Don't retire the tennis shoes just yet. Exercise in pregnancy is important for mother and baby, says Dr. Paul DuTreil with the Crescent City Physicians at Touro Infirmary. He explains that a healthy mother provides a better pregnancy outcome and gives endurance for labor.

You can continue to work out at a similar level to which you are accustomed, but do not increase the intensity. Most importantly, monitor your heart rate, being sure to keep it below 140 beats per minute.

#2. Spicy food can bring on labor

Dr. Jordan states this myth is completely wrong. Unless the spicy food gives you really severe diarrhea, that is. She says in that particular case, prostaglandins would be released—which would soften the cervix.

New mother Heather Dempsey of Kenner says while she was pregnant she ate spicy foods all the time and it never bothered her. And several myths, including the next one, failed to bring on labor.

She ended up being induced.

#3. Flying is dangerous—it can cause miscarriage or induce labor

“Airplanes are pressurized and there is no increased risk of miscarriage or pregnancy complications due to

flying. Long flights create longer periods of immobility and can predispose a pregnant patient to DVTs (deep vein thrombosis) of the lower extremities,” says DuTreil.

Obstetricians typically do caution their patients against flying close to their delivery dates to avoid giving birth in an unfamiliar place (for example, a plane).



#4. Raising your arms above your head will strangle the baby

You raise your arms above your head in an extended yawn. Relaxing, yes, till someone tells you that in the process, you might

have tangled the umbilical cord around your baby's neck.

“Absolute nonsense,” states Jordan.

DuTreil says, “the umbilical cord...is suspended in the fluid surrounding the baby and is also cushioned by this fluid. The cord goes from the baby to the placenta which is attached to the wall of the uterus. This is completely independent of the mother's movements.”

#5. Don't swim or bathe while pregnant

This is mostly bunk. DuTreil says that water can be soothing

for the aches and pains of pregnancy. Water buoys you and can help relieve those pressure points. And swimming can be great exercise for a pregnant woman.

However, both DuTreil and Jordan caution pregnant women to avoid overly hot

The B-B-Q Shrimp at Pascal's Manale has long been the New Orleans woman's secret weapon to induce overdue labor!



baths, especially soaking in them, which would raise your body core temperature excessively; this action has been associated with birth defects.

#6. The fetal heart rate or how you are carrying can determine the sex



The saying goes: a low heartbeat means it's a boy; high, it's a girl.

Another myth says that you can tell your baby's gender by the way you are carrying, again low for a boy, high for a girl. Don't decorate your baby's room based upon these sex "tests."

"Babies' heart rates vary from 120-160 beats per minute in both boys and girls and can be anywhere in that range at various times of the day. Depending upon when you check the heart rate you could determine it's a boy at one time and a girl at another," says DuTreil.

As far as "carrying," he says that depends on the mother's bone and muscle structure. Prior pregnancies and the baby's position in the uterus is also unreliable for gender prediction.

#7. Limit the use of electronic equipment

Okay, we're all in trouble, especially post-Katrina, if

pregnant women have to minimize the use of cell phones. Microwaves and even computers round out the myth-list of dangerous equipment.

Jordan recommends that everyone should avoid excessive use of microwaves. But, computers and cell phones give off such brief exposures of low dosage radiation, even hours spent on them every day provide a minimal risk of damage.

#8. Caffeine is off-limits

Don't think just because you're pregnant means giving up the chicory or sodas. Jordan's advice? "Everything in moderation.

I frequently recommend that a patient continue her usage in a low level," she says. "I warn my patients if they stop cold turkey they'll have a horrible migraine headache. Wean it down slowly."

What's low you ask? Sad to say, but a cup a day. If you drink caffeinated soda, that counts, too.

#9. Your cat is completely off-limits during your pregnancy



Actually, it's just his litter box. A pregnant woman could get toxoplasmosis from airborne spores, that if inhaled, could cause brain damage to a fetus. But, the chances of an indoor cat carrying this are rare.

In fact, Jordan says, "you have a higher risk of developing a toxoplasmosis infection if you work in the garden without wearing gloves. Be extra cautious (of stray cats depositing feces.)"

So, keep your cat; just get your hubby to change out the litter box.

#10. Sleeping on your back can hurt the baby

There is truth to this one. DuTreil explains that the weight of the uterus restricts blood flow as it returns to the heart and therefore decreases the amount of blood flow coming out of the heart. Then, the amount of oxygen the baby receives is decreased by this decreased flow. It can also cause lightheadedness and nausea in the mother by a similar mechanism.

It's recommended that women stop sleeping on their backs by their 20th week of pregnancy. Instead, try sleeping on your left side, to reduce further the stress on the vena cava.



Another nice little drop quote here would be divine!

#11. Skip the salon while pregnant

Who can think about a healthy pregnant glow when you're facing the scary prospect of half-foot-long dark or (gasp) grey roots by your delivery date?

"There has never been any proof to substantiate any problems [of coloring hair while pregnant]," says Dr. Christine Jordan, an Ob/Gyn at East Jefferson General Hospital in Metairie. None-the-less, she adds that most women do tend to be more cautious—perhaps skipping the salon—during their first trimester.



#12. Get it on to bring it on

We've all heard it—making mad, passionate love will induce labor.

"There is truth to this. I'm known to tell a woman is who is full-term to go home and get in the bed," Jordan says.

Why? Because the semen contains large amounts of prostaglandin, which help the cervix shorten and soften so it will dilate. 🌸



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