The Pregnancy Diaries: Things My Mother Did That We Now Know Not To

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — August 22, 2017

In this household, we are pretty fortunate to have my mother living with us. In fact, it was my husband’s idea to move her in after my father passed away. What can I say, he has a heart of gold. Or, he was ten steps ahead of me knowing that we would one day have a full-time, live-in nanny... free of charge! As D-Day is quickly approaching, mom and I have discussed many baby topics, from delivery, to nursing, and beyond.

During our in-depth chats and some passive comments, I have come to realize that my eastern European mother raised us in a very different time — culturally and socioeconomically. Yes, we all survived, and yes we turned out fine (I think), but there are some unsafe habits better left in the past, and mom was surprised — and in some cases a little put off — to hear it.

Back Is Best
Perhaps the most critical advice I could receive as a new mother did not come from my own who, much to her surprise, did not know that 'back is best' when it came to safe sleeping positions. In this case, I made sure my mom understood the risks, and there are plenty. Placing babies on their backs before they go to sleep reduces the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) — one of the leading causes of infant death. Here at the council, we have covered this topic [1] extensively. And despite tireless efforts from groups like us, and the Safe To Sleep Campaign [2] whose efforts span over two decades, only 43.7 percent of mothers report [3] intending to and actually using this method. According to the study — which surveyed 3,297 mothers — the two main reasons mothers may steer from the 'back is best' advice is for fear the child may choke while sleeping, and that stomach sleeping is simply more comfortable. In other cases, mothers felt that it's up to the baby or another family member of how to best be put to sleep.

The numbers are staggering, but not surprising. Given that my own mother was not aware of just how risky tummy sleeping for babies can be, I cannot help but think that this dangerous advice has been passed down from moms and aunts to daughters and nieces for years. And who could blame her? She hasn't needed to keep up with new guidelines in decades. Thus, it's easy to see how women with limited access to outside resources and information can unsuspectingly follow along.

Temperature Awareness

My mother thinks everyone is cold, all the time. She especially thinks this about babies. This is evident by baby pictures of me in my crib, with stuffed animals and blankets galore. After my baby shower, she inquired why I did not get a single long-sleeved onesie. I explained to her that babies don't typically need to have too many layers on — she was appalled! Overheating a baby [4] is yet another risk factor in SIDS. On the other hand, insufficient thermal insulation can also increase the risk. Typically, swaddling a newborn is one of the best ways to keep him or her comfortable at night. Absolutely no loose blankets (or any blankets) are to be in the crib or bassinet while the baby is sleeping. This can increase the risk of suffocation, which is another contributor to SIDS.

Honey

When we were babies, mom says she used to dab a little honey on our lips for an afternoon snack. Yum!

Although honey seems like a wholesome and nutritional food to give to a baby, it is not recommended until they are at least 12 months in age, and mom just can't wrap her head around this one. Honey can contain spores of bacterium called Clostridium botulinum, [5] which can wreak havoc on a baby's immature digestive system. It can cause infant botulism, a rare but potentially life-threatening illness. Cooking the honey, or with it, will not always kill the spores, either. The spores are usually harmless to adults and children over one year old. As I stated, infant botulism is rare, but given that honey is unnecessary for an infant, it's best to avoid it.

Mom Knows Best?

So how in the world did we kids survive the endless supply of honey, multi-layered dress codes and a crib full of stuffed animals? Oh, and did I mention our 1978 Volvo didn't have working seatbelts? My story isn't all that unique. You too are reading this and reminiscing on the times dad
let you drive in his lap when you were four years old. Times were simply different back then, and I
don't know all the answers, but I do know that knowledge is power, and what we now know about
certain dangers has helped save countless lives.

Getting advice from mom can undoubtedly be persuasive, more so than that of a non-family
member or doctor. Her presence alone will make our lives as new parents 100-fold easier. She
knows how to soothe a crying baby, she can rock the recliner with the best of them, and
sometimes there is no one better than grandma to make a boo-boo go away. I cannot place value
on the lessons she has taught me. After all, mom really does know best. And every so often,
daughter knows best, perhaps when it can matter most.

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