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Photo: ST Ashleigh Sim

Surviving baby

Thu, Jan 21, 2010
Mind Your Body, The Straits Times

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Today's mums have probably heard this from their mums, who heard it from their mothers: If your child has a cough, drinking cold water will worsen it.

Here is another: Skip the dark soya sauce in meals for children who are down with chicken pox. Otherwise, the ugly scars will never go away.

Two baby guide books launched on Jan 7 largely debunk these myths which many Asian mothers are familiar with.

Conceived as a survival kit series, they are titled Baby Survival Kit and Toddler Survival Kit. Associate Professor Daniel Goh, the president of the Singapore Paediatric Society, who oversaw the editorial aspect of the project and is a contributor, said myths like the two cited here have no scientific basis.

The two books are the first efforts of Madaboutkids.com, a Singapore online portal for Asian parents. The project is supported by infant and child nutrition company Wyeth. "Many local cultural practices and beliefs may not be addressed by the usual Western baby manuals in bookstores," Dr Goh explained.

The two books are, of course, not just about dispelling myths.

If you believe, for instance, that eating fish can be good for your child's vision, this is true. Research has found that docosahexaenoic acid or DHA, which is found in the fats around the fish's retina, can positively affect vision.

Other topics like sleep, health and growth issues as well as general parenting advice are included.

"Lactose intolerance affects Asians a lot more, so we dwelt more on it than Western books would have," said Ms Rosalind Yeo, publisher of Madaboutkids.com.

Ms Yeo is a mother of three children aged 17, 16 and five.

She said the easy-to-follow chapters were based on tips and advice given by local doctors, nurses, midwives and parents.

"The doctors and nurses may be trained in Western medicine, but because they practise here in Asia, they are more suitable (as contributors) than experts from abroad," said Ms Yeo.

Another example of the books' relevance to Asian parents is the chapter on sleep.

"Asian parents tend to intervene more when it comes to getting their little ones to fall asleep," said Dr Goh, who has conducted research on infants' sleep habits.

He said Asian parents tend to pat and rock their babies to sleep before putting them into the cot, and pick them up again the moment they start crying.

Dr Goh said this will make the infants over-dependent on being soothed to sleep. "Over time, they have to learn to soothe themselves back to sleep if they wake up in the middle of the night," he added.

It will not hurt to let a baby cry for 15 to 20 minutes as long as the crying is not associated with hunger, pain or wetness.

Ms Yeo noted that Singaporeans usually enrol their children in pre-school much

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earlier than their Western counterparts.

To prepare parents for this, the book on toddlers has some advice for parents on preparing their child for preschool.

Madaboutkids.com hopes to raise about \$300,000 from the sale of the books, which will benefit the Assisi Hospice, the Children's Aid Programme and Food from the Heart.

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