

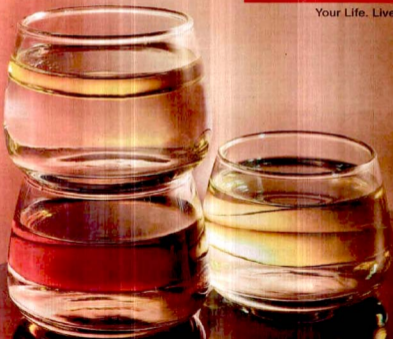
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Baby survival kit - for Asian parents

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Surviving baby

Two new baby guide books debunk health myths and provide parenting tips with an Asian slant.
STACEY CHIA reports

PHOTOS: ISTOCKPHOTO; MADABOUTKIDS.COM

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 dwell 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

It will not hurt to let a baby cry for

20 mins

as long as he is not hungry, in pain or wet

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 earlier than their Western counterparts.

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

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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PARENTS' SAY

Tips and comments from parents are featured at the end of each chapter in both books. The published comments are endorsed by doctors and experts. Here are a sampling of the quotes.

Baby Survival Kit:



"I believe in my mother's advice to offer some diluted barley water just before taking any vaccinations. It has certainly helped that my daughter hardly suffered from any fever the few days following her vaccinations in her first year." - Jessie Lai

"If your child is struggling with teething discomfort, dislikes or is bored with the teethingers you have at home, try having a cold, wet cloth in her mouth. This is easy and cheap!" - Ada Tang

"I started using flash cards when my son was about eight months old and he could recognise words at around 18 months, when he could speak much better. However, my experience is that only big cards with red words (English or Chinese) are effective. I only exposed him to the cards once a day and this has proven effective." - Mabel Tan

Toddler Survival Kit:



"I've decided that English is a much easier language to pick up since our environment is mostly English-speaking. As such, since my two younger kids were born, we spoke only Mandarin to them. I was worried initially but realised that as soon as my son started

preschool at age three, he learnt to speak English without much effort." - Joanna Loh

"A hard-boiled egg is the way to go to treat a bump on the head. It brings the swelling down almost immediately." - Patricia Tang

"I breastfed my first child until he was about 18 months old and my second one until she was about two. My milk supply had been low towards the end, as I only latched them on at night. To stop totally, I used vinegar to apply on my nipples as suggested by my paediatrician. It sounds a little odd, but both my kids were turned off by the smell." - Daphne Tan

Where to get the books

The two books - Baby Survival Kit and Toddler Survival Kit - priced at \$19.90 per copy, are available at Mount Alvernia Hospital and National University Hospital until Feb 11.

The books are also bundled with purchases of Wyeth Promil Gold or Wyeth Progress Gold at participating NTUC FairPrice supermarkets until Feb 11. For more information, log on to <http://www.survivalkit.com.sg>

Rely on instinct to bring up baby

I have some vivid memories of my early childhood, one of which was that of my father patting me to sleep when I was a toddler.

Today, such a practice would have been frowned on. But then, he must have thought it the best way to deal with a fretful child.

Fast-forward a few decades and, when I was a new parent myself, I brought my infant daughter home from the hospital and put her directly into her own cot, in the room my husband and I had prepared for her – as advocated.

I had read all the literature I could get my hands on in France, where I lived then. I had also devoured a copy of the childcare “bible” of that era written by Dr Benjamin Spock.

I had resolved to follow the advice from all these specialists on how to bring up baby – like letting him “cry it out” and I did find some of the tips useful. However, most of the time, I ended up relying on pure gut instinct and, more importantly, on available resources.

If I was patted or rocked to sleep as a toddler, it was largely because there were resources available to help a young mum cope with a crying child in the large Asian household where I spent my first years.

The “resources” comprised my parents, grandparents, siblings and cousins – all living under one roof in a large colonial bungalow. This changed only a few years later when my parents set up their own home. And in post-colonial Singapore, domestic help was still cheap anyway.

The circumstances were totally different for me in the do-it-yourself culture of Europe where I also did not have a battalion of helpers and advisers intervening every time my baby cried. Actually, I was thankful for that. But my point is that letting my baby cry and not running to pick her up at the slightest squeak was not just an option; it was also a necessity.

Most childcare books also advocate having baby sleep in his own room and in his own bed so he will not become over-dependant on your presence. In theory, that’s a great idea. In practice though, it would be impossible for a low-income or multi-child family.

Two books have just been compiled specially for Asian parents with tips on bringing up babies and toddlers (Page 10).

Their publication is timely and relevant and we are always grateful for expert advice. However, very often, the best way to go is to rely on your instinct – and listen to your heart.



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