

BIRTH TRADITIONS AND TRIVIA

Calling all... Midwives!

The term midwife comes from the Anglo-Saxon *midwife* or “with woman.”

IN...	MIDWIVES ARE CALLED...
France	<i>La sage femme</i> or wise woman
Germany	<i>Weise Frau</i> or <i>Hebamme</i> , mother’s advisor, helper or friend
Portugal, Spain	<i>Comadre</i>
Hawaii	<i>Kahunas</i> and can be male or female
Navajos of Arizona	“The one who holds”

First Food Traditions

COUNTRY	FOOD	TRADITION
Afghanistan	Sugar butter	Fed to infants the first six days of life to symbolize cleansing
Japan	A single grain of rice	On the on-hundredth day after birth it is placed in the baby’s mouth with a chopstick to symbolize his or her acceptance into the community
Tibet	Butter	Midwives put blessed butter on the tip of the baby’s nose at birth to symbolize wishes for good health, longevity and an abundance of nourishing food
Ghana	Water and alcohol	A drop of each are placed on the baby’s tongue at birth to symbolize the difference between truth and lies
Westphalia	Baked apple	Westphalian grandmothers put a piece of the baked fruit into the baby’s mouth believing that after eating human food, the child has gained the right to live

- ♥ The Mtoli culture believes that a baby’s life begins when the baby was first wanted (even if not yet conceived).
- ♥ In ancient Persia:
 - * A new baby is welcomed as a dear friend returning from a long journey.
 - * Mom and baby rest together for six days after birth. On the seventh day, the baby is moved to the cradle. Bread or cake is wrapped up with the baby as food for the journey to the cradle.
- ♥ In Ireland, India and Siberia, several preparations are made to remove any obstruction to birth. When a woman begins laboring:
 - * Animals are set free.
 - * Each member of the family loosens their hair.
 - * All pots are left uncovered.
- ♥ Will the baby be a boy or a girl?
 - * In Greece, a pair of scissors and a key are placed on separate chairs. The pregnant woman is brought into the room and asked to sit down. If she chooses the chair with the scissors, she will bear a girl. If she chooses the chair with the key, it will be a boy.
 - * In parts of England, a piece of cotton is held over the stomach of a pregnant woman. If the cotton moves back and forth, she will have a boy. If the cloth hangs straight and still, a girl.
 - * An Aztec formula that a number of Manhattan obstetricians swear by goes as follows. Note the age of the mother at the time of conception, then note the year of conception. If both are even or both are odd, a girl will be born. If one of the numbers is even and one odd, expect a boy.

- ♥ In Uganda, Seibei women in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy are massaged by an old woman “with knowledge.” Butter is rubbed on their abdomens to determine if the baby is in an undesirable position. If so, through external massage, the old woman manipulates the baby into a correct delivery position. We call this an external version!
- ♥ In Bali, the umbilical cord is kept in a special box. When the child grows up and is ready to leave home, the cord is given to the child to symbolize cutting the ties between mother and child.
- ♥ The caul or “veil” is part of the amniotic sac, the bag of waters. Sometimes, the bag remains intact and covers the baby when the baby is born. This is called being born “under the caul” and it has been considered an omen of good luck since at least the time of the Romans. It was believed that babies born under the caul would never die by water. The caul, when preserved as a talisman, was also believed to protect against drowning. Midwives would sell the caul to sailors to protect them from storm demons. The baby born under the caul is believed to possess the ability to foresee the future, see ghosts and talk to them, and, even if deaf, hear the spirits talk.
- ♥ In Korea, it is traditional for a woman to live with her in-laws, so she is attended by her mother-in-law at her birth. After giving birth, a new mother receives no visitors, not even her own mother, for 21 days. During that time, she slept, ate and nursed her baby. A rice stalk was erected in front of the house to alert neighbors that visits at this time were not appropriate. A red pepper was placed on it to signify the birth of a boy, a piece of wooden charcoal for a girl. When the baby was 100 days old, the family hosted a big party, passing plates of food to family and neighbors. They in turn placed big pieces of long white cotton thread on them to symbolize long life for the baby.
- ♥ After giving birth, a woman of the Baganda tribe of Uganda is attended by family and friends for an entire month. Her body is massaged, meals are prepared for her family, laundry is washed and special soups are prepared for the mother to stimulate her milk production.
- ♥ The women of the Tlinget tribes of Alaska suffer little in childbirth and have been known to give birth in their sleep.
- ♥ When an infant laughs for the first time, the Navajos exchange gifts to mark the occasion. The person who made the baby laugh hosts the party.
- ♥ It is believed in Russia that the child given an egg, a piece of bread, a box of salt and a box of matches will be blessed with fast growth, good health and luck.
- ♥ In Provence, France, the same gifts of salt, bread, an egg and a match will cause a baby to grow up as wise as the salt of the sea, as good as bread, as robust as an egg, and as straight as a matchstick.
- ♥ American birth and infancy superstitions:
 - * If a married woman is the first one to see a newborn baby, that woman will become a mother.
 - * If one finds a baby pacifier, there is going to be an addition to the family.
 - * A bright star in the sky means there will soon be a birth.
 - * Conceiving under the increase of the moon or in the moonlight means there will be a girl.
 - * A woman with child is always lucky.
 - * If a pregnant woman steps over a rope to which a horse is tied, she will be late in delivering.
 - * Heartburn while pregnant means your child will have a full head of hair.
 - * If she is born on Christmas day, your daughter will be able to speak with animals and spirits.
 - * A baby speaks with angels when it smiles.
 - * A daughter will be lucky if she resembles her father.
 - * If a baby teethes early, it is making way for a new baby.