Maternity Lore

Pregnancy has connected women since the beginning of the world. It is a sacred experience that is difficult to explain to the uninitiated. Every day, more women are discovering their entry into the secret club of mothers, and wisdom is being passed on. Through experience, logic, and crazy traditions, pregnancy has become an orderly experience.

Though each pregnancy is a unique journey, there is a basic road map of expectations, penciled in by mother after mother who faced the terrifying unknown and determined to leave behind a means for her future daughter to avoid being taken completely by surprise. Every pregnancy begins with conception, though many couples struggle with infertility, so it is often included in the lore for future mothers to know that they are not alone as they try vainly to access the powers of creation. Once conception occurs, there is a period of great discomfort. Many women experience morning sickness for at least the first trimester of their pregnancy, if not the whole thing. Morning sickness is only a specific type of discomfort, but it is usually so debilitating and incurable that it frequently becomes the topic of conversation. Other discomforts are more varied and avoidable, though no less uncomfortable to those who get stuck with swollen feet or varicose veins. Not only can those discomforts permanently disfigure the mother, they can also affect the unborn fetus. Fetuses are delicate in ways that people just aren’t. Sometimes things that the mother would be perfectly safe doing could spell death for her unborn child. Sometimes, though, fetuses just die, and there isn’t anything the mother could have done to prevent it. Without some truly horrific trial and error tests, there is really no way to know which is which. Instead, parents of lost children compare their stories and attempt to figure out the cause of tragedy.

Before the advent of ultra sound technology, women were also forced to prepare for a new addition to the family without any knowledge of the gender of said addition. Many fortune telling techniques were perfected solely for the purpose of gender prognostications. About fifty percent accurate, the curiosity drew most women to try at least a few techniques, though after ultra sound, fewer women were curious enough to seek out such methods.

Once the pregnancy has gone on long enough, labor becomes inevitable. Spoken of as the most painful thing that a woman can experience, the idea of going into labor after nine months of uncomfortable anticipation is both a welcome relief, and a terrifying prospect. On the one hand, after labor, the mother can have a beautiful baby and stop experiencing the horrifying physical effects of carrying another human being inside her womb. On the other hand, mild discomfort is better that
earth splitting pain. Lore about labor mostly consists of pain relief techniques, anesthesia horror stories, and methods of inducing labor.

The last bit of lore is new baby lore. Transitioning from pregnancy to a new baby is a change that no one is truly prepared for. The baby can’t speak or express its needs in any way that adults are used to dealing with, so those with experience must impart the necessary translation guides.

Every piece of carefully handed down advice is treated as fact by those who give it, despite wildly ranging validity. Some things are completely ridiculous, while others are surprisingly accurate. Occasionally, it is difficult to discern between the two extremes. Modern medicine has gone a long way to test many of the long held beliefs of previous generations, so it is always important to consult a well-researched physician before following folk medical beliefs. That being said, the experience of generations of women should not be immediately dismissed because the scientific method wasn’t applied.

Activities Affecting the Fetus

Pregnancy brings with it many fears for the future that mothers-to-be have little control over. Miscarriage and birth defects loom over expectant parents who just want that perfect first child to love and adore.

Before advances in medicine, there was no way to know whether the actions of the mother had any effect on the baby, but sometimes it was better to assume some action had caused the problem than to feel powerless.

Pregnancy and New Baby Lore (FA 01 45)

For women who commonly experience miscarriages, any advice that might help them keep a baby may seem like good advice. Activities or foods that could be avoided were preferable to a platitude regarding a higher plan. Some mothers avoided things like stretching because they feared that the movement of their bodies would strangle the baby inside. Others avoided swimming in cold water so the temperature couldn’t kill the baby while in the womb. Foods like geen skinned potatoes were thought to poison babies, so pregnant women shouldn’t eat them.

Folk stories supported these beliefs, and were told over and over again. One woman slipped on ice and rolled down her driveway while eight months pregnant. She only wanted to visit her sister, but
instead she went into early labor and lost her baby. Other women have attested that attitude rubs off on the baby, so if the pregnant woman isn’t completely ecstatic about her state of being, her baby will feel unloved. One woman said her grandmother was so upset to be pregnant that her mother never felt loved.

Other activities that people think will affect the fetus are less dire. Silly tales of birthmarks being created by such activities as eating too many raspberries or being frightened by mice are told in humorous anecdotes, but rarely believed. To support the growing fetus intellectually, some older women claim that eggs are good ‘brain food’ and should be eaten at a rate of a dozen per day.

Others attest that reading to the belly causes the baby to become interested in books. Reading to the belly in another language enhances the baby’s language skills somehow, and sleeping nude produces less inhibited children. There is no direct evidence of cause and effect, however a correlation between parents who are willing to read to an unborn baby and parents who continue reading to their children throughout childhood definitely exists.

**The Lore of Pregnancy (FA 01 229)**

Much of the advice about unborn babies is contradictory and absolutely unsupported by any kind of fact. Things like ‘scrubbing the floor on hands and knees may cramp and kill the baby’ are directly contradicted by people saying that ‘scrubbing the floor on hands and knees is good for both mother and baby because the position alleviates pressure on internal organs.’

Other advice declares that crossing her legs while pregnant may cause a woman to miscarry, leaning over isn’t good for the baby, and reaching up with her arms could cause a woman to ‘pull something loose’ and miscarry. While the physicality of a pregnant women may affect her comfort levels, babies are a bit more resilient than all that. Other advice concerning birth defects and other hazards of poor behavior during pregnancy is more believable, though no less likely to be skewed or misrepresented.

Drinking coffee during pregnancy may increase chance of birth defect. Smoking or drinking during pregnancy increases chances of having small, stupid babies. General anesthesia can cause babies to be less intelligent. Pregnant women shouldn’t inhale fumes from fresh paint. It will coat the baby’s lungs and cause it to suffocate. None of these claims are scientifically proven, yet studies have shown that things like coffee and smoking can lead to problems, so the lore has its place as a warning system to pregnant mothers.
Instead of focusing on the safety of the baby, much of the lore focuses on the intelligence. Claims that protein increases babies’ IQ by building the brain, and reading while the baby is in the womb will make it more intelligent are peppered throughout any advice given to an expectant mother. Mobiles above cribs, breast feeding, and the amount a baby is held are also used as a vehicle for ensuring offspring’s intelligence. Musicianship and spirituality are also painted with this brush.

The best advice included in the pseudo-medical category is that pregnant women should avoid taking medication unless it is prescribed by her doctor. After that warning, many supplements are prescribed, as well as exercises meant to help with labor. Presumably, those should also be run by a competent obstetrician.

**Everything You Should Know About Pregnancy?? (FA 01 456)**

A traditional belief is that the things a mother sees while pregnant will leave a mark on their baby. One woman had a son who hopped around everywhere, and she was convinced that it was because a rabbit crossed her path once while she was pregnant. While that story may sound ridiculous, there is a lot of lore in the same vein. Stories about birthmarks state that the mark comes from something the pregnant woman saw during pregnancy, and will be a fully formed image, despite the fact that few people have birthmarks that look like any recognizable shape.

One woman’s aunt had a bright red birth mark all over her face, and her mother claimed that it came from the time she had watched the Chicago Fire, and been so overcome that she threw her hands to her face. The baby’s facial markings were in the same place she had touched her own face.

Some believe that emotions factor hugely into the growth and development of the baby, to the point where they blame their own emotions for any miscarriages they have. Because of this, pregnant women are advised against attending funerals, because their babies will be negatively impacted.

One woman had a miscarriage of twins when she was six months pregnant, and became pregnant very shortly afterwards. She didn’t want to be pregnant again, and was very despondent about it. The baby ended up with one leg shorter than the other and a toe that stuck straight out the side. The woman felt that this was punishment for not wanting the child.

Other actions of the mother are said to similarly affect unborn children, though their results are less dire in nature. One woman really wanted a musical child, so she religiously studied music through the nine months of her pregnancy. The child was never talented in music, but it was very stubborn.
Eating certain foods may affect the baby in various ways, though the most common beliefs are that eating burnt toast during pregnancy can cause the baby’s hair to curl, and that things that the mother craves during pregnancy will be hated by the child after birth.

**Folklore of Pregnancy and Birth (FA 01 510)**

From experience, several mothers have concluded that having an early baby shower will cause the baby to come early. It is unclear as to whether they considered this a benefit or deterrent to an early baby shower. Another seemingly unconnected action that’s said to have an absurd amount of control over is a woman’s choice in sweeteners. According to some, eating honey instead of sugar will allow a baby to be born with hair that doesn’t fall out.

A bit more sensible a concern is that riding a horse while pregnant will cause miscarriage or difficult birth. While riding itself may not be the direct cause of such difficulties, there is a bit of truth. Horses are always a danger to the rider. At any moment, they may decide to throw their rider or the rider may just fall off. Either of those things can be very damaging to a precious new life. Much jostling may also cause displacement of the fetus, especially after twelve weeks. Experienced riders may be able to handle a bit more than amateur riders, but the loss of energy most women experience causes even experienced riders to be at higher risk for accidents.

**Pregnancy and Birth Folklore (FA 01 1283)**

A woman and her husband went for a walk in the woods while the wife was seven months pregnant. The husband left his young wife for a few minutes while he relieved himself in the bushes, and she had an encounter with a bear. She was so terrified by the snarling, looming bear that she fainted. The bear wandered away, uninterested. Her husband found her and rushed her to the hospital to make sure she was okay. The doctor told her she and the baby would be fine, but not to be surprised if the incident had left a ‘mark’ on the baby. When she finally had the baby, the doctor delivered it and exclaimed ‘Oh my! Your baby has bear feet!!’

**“Whipping Cream Makes Men More Fertile” And Other Folk Beliefs of Pregnancy (FA 01 1479)**

In Madagascar, a common belief is that women who eat fish during pregnancy will have scaly skinned babies. This might be a reference to children with eczema though.
Like many bits of lore designed to give parents a false sense of control of their unborn child, there is a prevalent idea that listening to classical music during pregnancy will guarantee a sophisticated, intelligent child.

Some of the lore for pregnant women is designed to control the behavior of women. Instead of being based in concern for the mother, the warnings seem to have been made up on the spot with less than benign intent. Some claim that women who gossip a lot during pregnancy will have deformed babies. Though perhaps a woman who believes such a tale should be gossiping less and reading more.

Other tales are a bit sillier, such as the claim that women who hear dogs barking and don’t cover their ears will suffer miscarriage. While it is completely inappropriate to joke about something so serious, the action that would result in an expectant mother following this advice wouldn’t actually harm her or force her to make major life changes.

Cats carry a bit of a stigma for being dangerous to pregnant women. Stray cats may carry a disease called Toxoplasmosis that can harm pre-birthed children if their pregnant mothers handle the cat’s litter. The disease comes from a parasite in contaminated rodent meat. House cats rarely eat fresh meat, let alone the infected kind.

Sometimes it seems that ease pregnancy and desire for children have an inverse relationship. People who barely thought of children at all are pregnant faster than they can snap their fingers. Others who long for children go through years of trial and error and experience hardships like miscarriage and infertility.
Many will take even the strangest advice if it means they’ll finally get pregnant. Then, there comes the beginnings of a new life, when the couple is baffled, not sure what exactly what is going on and if their dreams have finally come true come true.

Everything You Should Know About Pregnancy???(FA 01 456)

Fertility isn’t something that people knew much about, so sometimes they thought that food or other activities would greatly affect it. Whipping cream was meant to make men more fertile, so depending on how a woman felt about children, she could change her husband’s dessert. However, most beliefs on the matter were quite serious in nature.

One especially prevalent belief is that adopting will increase chances of pregnancy. A couple needs only to file for adoption to become pregnant, so a few couples filed without the intent of actually adopting. They were pleased that they got pregnant afterwards.

One woman was told to hold her legs up all night to become pregnant, which she tried, but she wasn’t successful. Her difficulties may have come from vague wording disguising the actual intent of the advice because another woman actually tried having intercourse while keeping her legs up, and she got pregnant.

Couples who really want to get pregnant should abstain from intercourse for a few months before they attempt to conceive to ‘increase the supply.’ After the first pregnancy, people usually don’t have trouble with fertility again.

The moment of conception is magical, and some people claim that they can feel a tingle the moment that the egg and sperm meet.

The first moment a baby’s movement is discernible to its mother feels like a gas bubble or a burp, but can be described as a brand new butterfly emerging from its chrysalis and flapping its wings gently. Most people describe it as gas though.

Some women have an allergic reaction to being pregnant, and get little red clots on their wrists. Another woman gets swollen gums. Despite this, some claim that women who are pregnant are beautiful and glowing. No matter what they actually look like, they are beautiful and glowing.

When babies develop fingernails, some mothers can feel them scratching at their insides. It is not a pleasant feeling.
One woman believes that she felt the first signs of life exactly 4 ½ months through the pregnancy. This was helpful as she was unable to pinpoint a conception date for her doctor, so they didn’t know when to make a due date. They predicted the due date based on the first feeling of life, and were accurate as to the child’s birthday.

Babies are born at the same time of day as they are conceived.

**Folklore of Pregnancy and Birth (FA 01 510)**

Twins are a really strange phenomenon that pepper some family trees and completely avoid others. How can such a thing be explained? Instead of one baby, two brand new human beings are brought into the world. Some say that twins occur when a couple has intercourse more than once a night. Others claim that twins happen every third generation. Neither of these suppositions is remotely true, but sometimes it brings comfort to impose order into the world.

**Wives’ Tales About Pregnancy (FA 01 910)**

If a couple is having trouble getting pregnant, the man should take a cold shower before intercourse. There is a lot of support for men taking cold showers in general, and apparently there are lots of health benefits to doing so.

On the women’s side of things, gagging on a toothbrush during a normal teeth brushing regime is occasionally considered a good indication of pregnancy.

**Discomfort During Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is a dramatic physical event. Over the course of nine months, a pregnant woman’s body changes radically. Then, in the aftermath of birth, there are stark remnants of the event that has occurred in the misshapen body of the new mother. Sure, it’s a natural event that the body is made to cope with, but that doesn’t stop women from wondering what parts are normal and what can be done to ease her discomfort.

**Pregnancy And New Baby Lore (FA 01 45)**
Discomfort during pregnancy can range from the relatively benign, like women who gain an extra sensitivity to smell, to the seriously impairing, women who experience temporary blindness inducing migraine. In between are a series of inconvenient, irritating, or painful symptoms, like pinched nerves in the belly. These moderate discomforts are so common that folklore has sprung up around them, partly as an explanation, and partly as a distraction. For instance, heartburn during pregnancy is supposed to indicate a hairy child.

Cures for these common ailments are also a subject of folklore. Soup and raspberry tea are commonly touted as quick fixes for nausea, and raspberry tea is kind of held up as a magic fixative that will solve any and all pregnancy woes as well as tasting awesome. Some mitigation of common complaints is even a bit humorous. One story explains that a mother was having difficulty with her baby kicking her in the exact same spot on her ribs. She gently nudged the foot through her stomach, moving it away from the sore spot, and the baby seemed satisfied to kick the mirror of the previous bruise.

The Lore of Pregnancy (FA 01 229)

‘Toxemia’ or pre-eclampsia, is a condition where pregnant women experience high blood pressure and protein in the urine, and if left untreated can lead to seizures during pregnancy. Through years of study, doctors have come to form many hypotheses about what causes it, but they still aren’t completely sure. It occurs in a wide variety of women, including those who already suffer from high blood pressure, or obesity. Before pre-eclampsia became a treatable condition, it was a condition that plagued many women. Seizures are terrifying, so naturally, women would look for any way to prevent such an occurrence in their own pregnancy, even though they didn’t know the actual cause or what they could do to avoid it.

Lore told women that their toxemia was caused by emotional upset, so they should be more careful to regulate their emotions. Dietary reasoning was also considered, so pregnant women were also warned to avoid excessive salt intake, because salt increases water retention and swelling. Neither of these things have been proven to have any effect on toxemia, but neither of them are actively harmful restrictions either.

A less painful malady, but no less undesirable, is varicose veins. Like spider veins, varicose veins can occur from being overweight or pregnancy, and are unsightly additions to any leg. Problems with the veins could be caused by a lack of folic acid, though that’s less common. Many of the stories
surrounding what exactly causes varicose veins are completely false, but still really common in pregnancy folklore.

Everything from wearing knee socks to crossing the legs has been blamed for the causation, almost ironically, since compression stockings are actually a treatment.

A purely aesthetic ailment is stretch marks. Stretch marks occur on some people no matter what they try to do to prevent them, but that doesn’t stop people from trying. Rubbing cocoa butter or various oils on the stomach during pregnancy have been suggested for generations as a preventative measure against stretch marks. However, there is really no way to tell if a preventative is working, since some women just don’t get them in the first place.

**Everything You Should Know about Pregnancy???(FA 01 456)**

Pregnant women are often forbidden from physical activities for the sake of their unborn child. Hot baths, painting, stretching, and sleeping on her back are just a few of the many enjoyable things that a pregnant may be forced to give up. Reasoning is personalized for each activity, some of it valid, and some less so.

Some women are restricted, not because someone told them they must be, but because of extreme discomfort. One woman ate very little for the whole of her pregnancy because she couldn’t stand the smell of anything at the grocery store. Some babies hiccup when they are growing, to the discomfort of their mother.

Other discomforts come from physical appearance. A common misconception among women is that they are bigger when they have twins, but the pregnancy is more likely to be bigger if the muscles are still stretched from a previous pregnancy regardless of the amount of children in the womb.

Some women fake extreme pain when their husbands expect it. Classes in natural childbirth actually help a lot of women experience more comfortable childbirth.

**Pregnancy and New Baby Lore (FA 01 684)**

Different cultures have different ways of dealing with the discomforts and changes of pregnancy. Taiwanese women are given an entire month in which they must rest and eat and allow their family to help them recover from birthing. Conversely, Samoan women wear a girdle tightly around their
stomach to shrink it back to the original size, and otherwise seem to go back to normal immediately after birth.

In America, a product called Bagbalm is used to get rid of stretchmark’s. It’s a yellow goop that is mean to be put on the utter of a cow or goat to prevent cracking associated with excessive milking.

**Wives’ Tales about Pregnancy (FA 01 910)**

Miscarriages are one of the scariest things that can happen to an expectant mother. They are also distressingly common occurrences. When a woman experiences a miscarriage, her first instinct is to blame herself, to think that something she did must have caused the death of her baby. Women who’ve had miscarriages then tell newly pregnant mothers things to avoid to save them from experiencing the same misfortune. One woman warned that eating the burnt spots on French fries during pregnancy would cause something to come out wrong with the baby. Another advised that long car trips during the first few months of pregnancy might cause a miscarriage. With a heart wrenching personal story, one woman revealed the roll that backless sandals had in her own fall and subsequent miscarriage. One grandmother told her daughter in law not to grieve too much for her son who died at nineteen months because it would ‘mark’ her unborn child. The child was born stillborn.

A bit less scary, is the prevalence of cavities in pregnant women. Some believe that they come from the excess acid that comes of throwing up every morning for a few months. Others believe that the baby itself sucks the calcium out of its mother’s teeth and bones.

Hair is very concerning to women, whether it be her own hair or that of her future child. Folklore has sprung up around the experience many women have shared. Some women have commiserated over the loss of their natural curl, or their hair changing color with each baby. One woman frequently permed her hair. Her mother warned her that getting a perm during pregnancy wouldn’t work, because something about being pregnant prevents chemicals from working. She didn’t care what her mom thought, so she got it anyway, and it worked.

Her own hair isn’t the only hair a mother worries about. Lore concerning a baby’s hair is just as prevalent. One of the oft told tales is that a pregnant woman’s leg hair is an indicator of how much hair her baby will have. If her leg hair stops growing as much, it means the hair is being diverted to the child’s head, and it’ll have a lot of hair when it’s born. Another weirdly common tale is that eating burnt toast and bread crusts will ensure a curly haired baby.
A woman’s body also changes a few other ways when she is being turned into a cocktail of pregnancy hormones. During pregnancy, gold jewelry will turn the skin green if a woman becomes iron deficient. Another odd change is shoe size. Some women’s feet get wider and/or longer after each pregnancy.

**PREGNANCY FOLK BELIEFS (FA 01 1442)**

Preventing stretch marks is a common bit of lore. Advice about it ranges from sensible to quite odd. For example, some women suggest that fifteen crunches every morning and night will toughen stomach skin somehow, and that will prevent stretch marks as well as getting rid of the baby weight. Other women suggest that eating two apples every day during pregnancy will prevent stretch marks because of some unnamed property in apple skins.

**Pregnancy Lore: Exposed and Explored (FA 01 1501)**

After pregnancy is over, one of the major discomforts still ailing women is the deformation of her stomach. Some say that lying on her stomach for thirty minutes a day after pregnancy will return a new mother’s stomach to its former flatness. Others encourage breast feeding as a means get rid of postpartum weight.

**Pregnancy-Related Cures: Folk Beliefs in Female Mormonism (FA 01 2013)**

Many pregnant women get swollen feet, but they can reduce the swelling by raising them up above the heart. When it comes time for delivery, many women can’t even reach their own feet, so a little extra attention is appreciated. Some women tell their husbands that there is a spot on the foot that will induce labor if pressed. Finding the spot is difficult, so a foot massage is necessary to explore the foot. Whether or not foot massages are capable of inducing labor, they will certainly make a painfully overdue woman less cranky.

There are quite a few variants of things that pregnant women rub on their bellies to prevent stretch marks. From straight vitamin E to royal honeybee jelly, to olive oil, none of them are clinically proven to do much besides ensure peace of mind.

Cravings during pregnancy can cause a lot of grief. Cravings can be weird and inconvenient, and seemingly purposeless. Many believe that cravings are the body’s way of telling the pregnant woman that she’s missing a nutrient, so she should eat anything she craves as soon as she craves it.
Sleeplessness is also common, especially near the end of pregnancy. Hot milk will cure sleeplessness in pregnant women or really anyone.

**Gender Prognostications**

**Determining the Sex:**

With the advent of ultrasounds, couples can know within a few short months, the sex and health of their baby. Despite a few hiccups in the technology, it has only become more accurate as time marches on, and the idea of not knowing is more unusual than wondering. A few odd couples decide to wait until the birth of their child to learn its sex but for the most part human beings are curious. People for centuries have wondered and attempted to divine the sex of their child. Much folklore cropped up as women guessed and hoped and wished during their nine month wait.

**Pregnancy and New Baby Lore (FA 01 45)**

The Drano method is two part. The first part involves Crystal Drano, a kind of drain cleaning powder, which a woman who is more than six months pregnant can spit into to divine the sex of her unborn child. The woman must simply spit into a tablespoon of the powder, and observe the reaction. If the powder sizzles and turns black, she’s pregnant with a boy. If it remains inert, she’s having a girl.

The second part involves Liquid Drano. Hailed as the most accurate gender test involving drain cleaner, it is not recommended by chemists, who use a fume hood when trying it out, because of the caustic chemicals involved. That being said, it requires women to mix equal parts urine and Liquid Drano and observe the reaction. It is suggested that the Drano be poured into the toilet to observe rather than elaborate measures being taken to obtain a container full of urine to sample. If the solution turns green, the woman testing herself is carrying a girl. If the liquid turns blue, she’s carrying a boy. This test has about fifty percent chance of being accurate.

Another indicator used to discover the sex of an unborn baby is the amount of body hair of the mother. If the expectant mother gains an excess of body hair during pregnancy, it means she’ll have a boy. The theory behind this idea is that an excess of male hormones in a woman’s body from a baby boy will cause her to grow hair in places that extra female hormones wouldn’t influence.
It has been scientifically proven that the male's chromosomes dictate the sex of a baby. Though the results are approximately fifty percent, there other factors that determine gender. One of those ways is the PH of the mother during conception. Different environments are more supportive of male or female sperm, and those environments can be controlled by diet and hygiene practices. Lore claims that the easiest way for a mother to dictate the gender of her child is to eat a great deal of either bananas for a boy, or lemons for girl.

Another simple guarantee was for the woman to lie on her side during conception. If she chose the right side, she should get a boy, while lying on her left side would result in a girl.

Some pregnant women attempt to divine the sex of the baby by hanging a pencil by a string above their stomach. If the pencil makes a circular motion, the woman will have a girl. If the pencil makes a straight line back and forth, the baby will be a boy.

Another way to divine the sex of an unborn baby is by how it is carried. Babies carried low are occasionally thought to be male, while babies carried high are could be female. If the front pokes out and the sides don’t, the baby is a boy or if the sides poke out, the baby could be a girl. This advice is also told frequently in the reverse.

**The Lore of Pregnancy (FA 01 229)**

When a baby is late, many perpetuators of folk lore feel the need to comment. About half of them will claim that the lateness of the baby indicates a female, while the other half insists that males are the ones who come late.

They’ll also make claims about the behavior of the mother-to-be. Supposedly, those who are pregnant with a girl become more romantic during the pregnancy. The corollary to that would be that women who are pregnant with boys act more standoffish during pregnancy, though that claim wasn’t made. The claim that was made was that boys are more active in the womb. However, nearly every woman in child-bearing years who shared the claim also contradicted it with personal experience.

One bit of lore perpetuated by doctors before they had ultrasound was that girl's heart beats are faster than boys. Doctors would listen to the heartbeat with a stethoscope and tell the mother what she’d likely be having based on the speed.
Conception lore ranges from ridiculous to pseudo-scientific. Things like looking at the full moon during conception may seem romantic, but have no actual effect on the gender of the baby. Likewise, using the position of the bed can’t have much of an effect, but is still recommended.

The scientific advice is almost odder though. Some suggest various chemical mixtures to be applied before conception. There is also the calendar method which attempts to reason that the time a couple conceives during a woman’s cycle will determine the sex of the child. Intercourse once at ovulation will ensure a boy because male sperm are faster, while female sperm are long lasting, so if intercourse comes a while before ovulation, the female sperm will outlive its male opponents and live to fertilize the egg.

Various women have said they are sicker when they have one sex over the other, though few women have enough children to be able to have any kind of statistical certainty of the differences in pregnancy are based on gender versus just based on the fact that they’re having different children altogether.

A Greek doctor encouraged his patients to shine a light on their eye and count the dots on the bottom of their irises. If there is one dot, they’ll have a boy. Two dots indicate a girl. No word on if the dots change for every pregnancy or even which eye the dots should be counted in.

Another doctor’s method was equally nonsensical and even less useful. He claimed that he could tell the sex of a baby by the ears as the baby comes out. If he’d wait a few minutes, I’m sure he could know for sure.

The excitement of guessing the sex lives beyond the first baby, and the folklore adapts to include new situations. One way of determining the gender of a second or third child is based on the first baby’s first words. If the first baby say’s Dada first, the new sibling will be a boy. Likewise, Mama is the signifier for a new girl.

A couple of radio hosts used an interesting mathematical method to guess the gender of listeners’ babies. The woman’s age at conception plus the number of the month the baby is conceived in were added together. If the resulting answer was odd, they guessed that the baby was female; with even
numbers they guessed a boy. Surprisingly, this was more accurate than just guessing blind for their few listeners who called in.

**Pregnancy and New Baby Lore (FA 01 684)**

Young girls who wished to divine their future could look to their hands for answers. The amount of white marks on the fingernails indicates the amount of children a girl will have.

**Gender Prognostications in Pregnancy (FA 01 737)**

The first time a woman crosses the threshold into her home after finding out she’s pregnant will determine the gender of the baby. Crossing with the right foot indicates a boy, while crossing with the left indicates a girl. According to some, this is so powerful that if the baby was already one gender, but the woman walks across the threshold the opposite way, the baby will change in the womb.

Surprisingly many people seem to think that gender is a bit fluid in the womb, changing based on random activities of the mother. For example, her eating habits. Drinking milk in the morning will make the baby decide to be a girl, while eating a lot of shrimp in the morning will make a boy. One mother-in-law told her pregnant daughter-in-law to jump over the bed with a cowboy hat and boots on to guarantee a son. She had no method for guaranteeing daughters.

Some believe they can suggest gender to the baby by referring to it in gendered pronouns. But if they actually buy something that it too gendered, the baby will come out the opposite gender out of spite. Quite a few stories exist where a couple received a gift of a crib or other important baby necessity and it ended up being for the wrong gender.

Others believe more strongly in indicators beyond the mother’s control. If a woman’s fingernails grow faster than her toenails during pregnancy, she’ll have a girl. If her toenails grow faster, she’ll have a boy. If the couple has intercourse more after the woman becomes pregnant, it’s a sign that she’s carrying a boy, or if they have less, she’s carrying a girl. Some people get capillaries in their eye indicating gender of their unborn children. Other people just have bloodshot eyes.

Darker skinned women will perhaps notice a distinct coloration of their Linea Alba depending on the sex of the child, dark with a boy and light with a girl.

Darker urine during pregnancy indicates a boy. Or dehydration.
Baby Folklore (FA 01 1075)

If a woman eats the heel of a loaf of bread, she'll have a son. This was told by a cranky grandfather who wished the women in his life would stop wasting the end of the bread loaf. It is unlikely that this folklore spread beyond his family.

Other folklore is more general, but no less nonsensical. One woman claimed that mothers would ‘dribble’ on themselves more when they are pregnant with a boy than when they have a girl because girls are neater than boys. Others said that unplanned babies are more likely to be boys. Possibly something to do with girls being more organized or something like that.

Explaining the Unknown Folklore Associated With Pregnancy And Childbirth (FA 01 1088)

Lots of tales of the unreliability of ultrasounds refer to incidences like the one where a girl had her heel curled up between her legs, and the technician had mistaken her for a boy. They make the stories even more horrifying by describing a wealthy woman who went all out to make a perfect princess room for what turned out to be a baby boy.

Instead of something as unreliable as science, some suggest that a pregnant woman drinks five cups of black coffee. If the woman throws up, she’s having a girl, and if she can keep it down, she’s having a boy.

In the 1800s, a group of orphans were killed in a train wreck. Their ghosts rattle the train whenever children or pregnant women go in the car, so a woman who thought she might be pregnant went to the car to avoid unnecessary costs of pregnancy tests. The car shook, so she coughed up the money for a pregnancy test. She was pregnant.

Pregnancy and Birth Folklore (FA 01 1283)

A baby is more likely to be a girl if the parents have a very active sex life before her conception. This doesn’t explain the belief that after conception, an active sex life is an indicator of a male child. Or that male children are more likely to be the result of an unplanned pregnancy.

Determining the Gender of Your Baby (FA 01 1722)
The temperature of the woman’s body matters during conception. If the body is very warm, the baby will be a girl. If the body is normal temperature, the baby will be a boy. Or it would be if women could be the determining factor in their children’s genders.

**Pregnancy Folklore (FA 01 1807)**

Woman who look haggard and tired during pregnancy are going to have a boy, because boys take a lot of energy. Women who look radiant must have a girl inside them because girls give their mothers energy.

**Red Raspberries and Drano: Pregnancy Beliefs and the Influence of the Family (FA 01 1881)**

Brazilian Folk Lore states that if a pregnant woman is cooking a chicken heart and the heart opens up, she’ll have a girl. If the heart stays closed the baby will be a boy.

**Boy or Girl? Popular Folklore Surrounding Pregnancy (FA 01 1893)**

If the pregnant mother has sweaty palms, she’ll have a boy. Probably because boys are embarrassing.

**Baby Magic: Predicting the Sex of Your Unborn Child (FA 01 1993)**

There is a Chinese calendar that tells the baby’s gender with 89% accuracy by using time of conception and matching it up with the mother’s age to predict the baby’s sex.

Women have physical indications of the baby they are carrying. Those pregnant with a girl might have flared nostrils and red eyes. They’ll crave sweet things, because girls need lots of sugar and spice to form properly in the womb. Women who crave spicy foods and pickles are having boys.

**Pre-Birth Gender Prognostication (FA 01 2034)**

In Romania, they sprinkle salt on pregnant woman without her knowledge, and watch to see if she rubs under her nose or her lower lip first. If she brushes off her nose, she’ll have girl. If she rubs her lower lip, she’s having a boy.

Another Romanian method is for a friend to place pillows on the floor with various flatware beneath them. The Pregnant woman must choose a pillow to sit on. If she chooses the fork or spoon pillow, she’s having a girl, and if she sits on the knife pillow, she’s having a boy.
2079 Pregnancy Beliefs: Connecting Women through Folklore

Some believe that if the baby is a girl, it will steal some of the mother’s beauty during pregnancy. That would explain why the first child is always the most beautiful. Along with that bit of libel, some also believe that girls cause longer labor.

The only apparent slander of baby boys is that they shift to the right constantly, which could be considered quite annoying.

Pickles and Ice Cream: Control During Pregnancy (FA 01 2310)

A woman’s hair can indicate the kind of child she’s carrying. If she is cursed with stringy, unmanageable hair, she will have a girl child. A woman with shiny, easy to take care of hair will have a boy.

Labor Lore

Labor Lore:

Labor is terrifying. Even after dealing with the discomforts and sickness of pregnancy, most women would rather not go through the excruciating pain of delivering a relatively large baby out of a tiny orifice.

There are many ways to mitigate the pain of labor, but most of the ways that actually work were not invented until recently.

Pregnancy ad New Baby Lore (FA 01 45)

Labor is already hard enough, which is why any chance for reprieve will be considered by a terrified expectant mother. Some women choose not to eat after their water breaks because they believe that eating directly before delivery can cause the energy needed to have the baby to be diverted into digesting food. Other mothers tried deep breathing exercises to relax the body and avoid the pain tension can cause. Still more decide to chew ice in lieu of food.
Sometimes even waiting to go into labor can be uncomfortable. In desperation, women will try all sorts of odd things to induce labor. Drinking Caster oil in an attempt to go into labor may not work. Instead it gives drinker a terrible case of ‘the runs’.  

**The Lore of Pregnancy (FA 01 229)**

Foods and drinks are easy to change, so many women try strange things to ease pregnancy. Certain ‘herbs’ help speed delivery. And drinking red raspberry tea all through pregnancy will help with labor. Different oils are drunk with gusto in an attempt to control the misbehaving body. Castor oil is taken to induce labor, Cod Liver Oil to shorten labor. Most of these are unproven by scientists, but seem to make people feel better through the act of preparation itself.  

**Everything You Should Know About Pregnancy?? (FA 01 456)**

The time leading up to labor is terrifying. Women are told for most of their life that delivering a baby is the most terrible pain they will ever face. Preventing that pain can be more feasible with modern medicine, but that has its ups and downs. One woman suggested sitting over a pan of hot ashes to expand the bones for an easy delivery.

Predicting when the birth will occur is a large part of the lore. Babies can take a long or short time deciding to come out, but some claim that the baby will be very active right before labor, and then completely still right before delivery. A woman can utilize that information to know when to go to the hospital or call her midwife.

While there are many tales of lengthy, painful labor, there are also many tales of lightning quick labor that springs itself upon people at awkward moments. Getting lost on the way to the delivery ward, a few women have revealed that they delivered their baby in the elevator. Apparently this location isn’t as weird as it could be. One woman had her first three children in the elevator because her labors were so short. Other women have their babies in the car on the way to the hospital; including one with her other children in the back seat because they didn’t even have time to drop them off on the way to the hospital.

Having a baby at home can be a decision made by a family with a midwife on call. Or it can occur by accident, like the woman who had her baby in the living room while her husband was preparing her bag for the hospital. He called 911 to have an ambulance to come pick them up, and his mother, who was the telephone operator, gave him a copy of the tape for a baby present. Other home births
include the surprisingly common birth location of the toilet. Usually it happens when a young lady with mild labor pains thinks she’s having a bowel movement. A rarer example is the woman who had her baby on the front lawn. None of these stories explain what they do with the umbilical cord.

**Folklore of Pregnancy and Birth (FA 01 510)**

Women have babies more during big storms because the drop in barometric pressure induces labor.

**Pregnancy and Birth Folklore (FA 01 1283)**

In a way, mild birth stories can be worse than long, painful birth stories. When a woman doesn’t realize she’s about to give birth, she doesn’t have time to prepare and ends up having her baby in an odd place, like while she’s standing in line at the bank.

On the other hand, long birth stories are also occasionally terrifying. One woman was having difficulty with labor, so the nurse put a belt above her pregnant belly and pushed downwards.

**Pregnancy Lore and Folk Belief (FA 01 1502)**

Anesthesia first developed during the nineteenth century. A cocktail of drugs, including morphine, were administered to pregnant women to dull the pain and the memory of childbirth. This was popular until the late fifties, when women finally started to realize the dangers of such practices. At that point, women had little say in their care if they chose to go to a hospital, so babies had to be extracted with forceps or cesarean sections. The woman had no say in her own care, and may not have known much about childbirth even after giving birth to a child.

The women’s movement rejected the prevalence of men making decision about childbirth, so the early sixties brought on a secondary movement for natural childbirth. Some of their reasoning came from overly literal biblical interpretations. Because the bible tells them that Adam and Eve should have their children ‘in sorrow.’ This means refusing any pain medication during the birth, so they’ll experience pain.

Doctors are still useful though, and some even try alternative things like advising women to lie on their side as an extra measure against pain. Without doctors, many more women died. In fact, Puritans had such a high rate of death during pregnancy that they called any woman who was pregnant “on the couch” as in “on her death bed” and would call a mother “off the couch” if she survived the pregnancy.
The Folklore of the Pregnant Community (FA 01 1507)

One nurse told a pregnant woman to hold her breath to open a wider space for the baby to get out. Later that woman learned that holding her breath was the most painful, useless thing she could have done, because deep breathing is actually a better aid to labor.

Baby Folklore (FA 01 1075)

Ginger root may induce labor.

Pregnancy Folklore (FA 01 1807)

Orange juice may induce labor.

Red Raspberries and Drano: Pregnancy Beliefs and the Influence of the Family (FA 01 1881)

Some believe that women will have an urge to thoroughly clean their house the day that the baby will come, because their body knows the baby is coming, and wants everything to be ready.

Morning Sickness

Morning Sickness:

All but a lucky few pregnant women experience some kind of morning sickness. It’s not the sort of thing that can really be prevented, but for some women it becomes so bad that they’ll try almost anything to get past it.

The Lore of Pregnancy (FA 01 229)

Blood sugar may have an effect on morning sickness, one woman justified as she ate another candy bar as medicine.

Sleeping through morning sickness is a viable cure.

Everything You Should Know About Pregnancy?? (FA 01 456)
There is no cure for morning sickness, but some people say that dry popcorn, hard candy, soda crackers, avoiding smells, or dancing while doing the dishes will help.

Other cures include, sleeping with crackers under the pillow, drinking 7-up, taking vitamin B shots, chewing ice, eating carrots and celery.

Some men get sympathetic morning sickness.

**Wives’ Tales About Pregnancy (FA 01 910)**

One doctor told his patients that excessive morning sickness indicates a baby that won’t miscarry. In general, morning sickness can be a good sign for the health of an unborn baby.

**Pregnancy and Birth Folklore (FA 01 1283)**

Three sprigs of fresh mint leaves boiled in sixteen ounces of water served warm with soda crackers will relax a roiling belly. Taking a vitamin B pill and a sleeping pill before bed will help with morning sickness.

**PREGNANCY FOLK BELIEFS (FA 01 1442)**

One woman brought peanut butter and raspberry jam sandwiches to work, cut up in little squares, and she would eat bits of them during the day to stave off nausea.

Another woman’s mother suggested putting fresh roses under her pillow while she slept to prevent morning sickness. She said it worked for her mother’s four pregnancies, but it did not work for her own.

Drinking a Coke every morning was the cure all for one pregnant woman.

**The Folk Beliefs of Pregnancy Sickness Remedies (FA 01 1681)**

Morning sickness is better if the stomach isn’t completely empty in the morning, so one midwife encouraged her patient to place a can of peanuts on the back of the toilet so that if she had to get up in the middle of the night, she could eat a few and not wake up sick.
Some women wear copper bracelets on pressure points to attempt to get rid of morning sickness. Another option is terry cloth bands for the wrists that were made for sea sickness. Most women at least try soda crackers, ginger, or raspberry tea.

**Pregnancy Folklore (FA 01 1807)**

Wearing a blinder at night could possibly keep nausea down.

Prenatal vitamins should be taken at night to prevent morning sickness and keep the woman from throwing up her vitamins.

**Pregnancy-Related Cures: Folk Beliefs in Female Mormonism (FA 01 2013)**

Women with morning sickness may try lemon wedges with salt on them and small sips of lemon-lime soda, chewing mint leaves through the day, putting an open paper sack on the belly, or drinking pickle juice before eating or riding in a car.

**New Babies**

**New Babies:**

After all the trials of pregnancy and labor, a couple is left with a brand new person they’re suddenly responsible for. Without any kind of manual or tutor, they’re responsible for making sure they don’t kill the tiny delicate creature they’ve been entrusted with. They also have to do their best to raise their baby to become a productive member of society. That’s a bit of a scary prospect, considering that they’re barely productive members of society themselves most times.

**Pregnancy and New Baby Lore (FA 01 45)**

One grandmother told her granddaughter that picking up her child when it cried would spoil it, and she should only pick it up when it wasn’t crying as a sort of reward. She also claimed that babies will naturally fall into a schedule without prompting. Some lore of that nature appears to encourage a sort of neglect of infants. Likewise, tickling is discouraged as a precursor to stuttering, and women should never attempt to correct thinness with over feeding.
The only advice that appears to encourage parents to interact with their children more is the constant repetition that reading to children is the most important way to ensure that they become educated.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or ‘crib death,’ has been terrifying occurrence for as long as lore has been around. Scientists still don't know what causes it or how to prevent it. According to lore, New Zealand, has a lower rate of crib death due to their tradition of laying infants on sheep skins. This isn’t a safe practice, as many sheep skins contain arsenic. Honey has also been blamed for crib death, though it actually is the instigator of a completely unrelated killer of infants, called botulism. To avoid contracting botulism, infants should not be fed honey within the first year of their life.

**Pregnancy and New Baby Lore (FA 01 684)**

The full moon appears over and over in folklore. Human beings are fascinated by huge glowing orbs, hanging, unsupported in the sky, and can’t help but lend them supernatural properties. Some nurses claim that the hospital nurseries are fullest during a full moon. There is no statistical proof that the moon has any effect, but it’s a romantic notion.

A less romantic notion regards the inception of colic in a baby’s system. Some tellers of lore blame the colic on mothers who put their hands in cold water before nursing.

**Baby Folklore (FA 01 1075)**

Some women think that babies recognize the theme song of their mother’s favorite show if she watches it continually during her pregnancy. After birth, that theme song will calm the baby, or at least will relax the mom as she watches it without guilt.

According to some lore, a pregnant woman who sees a cripple during her pregnancy will give birth to a crippled baby. There is no indication of things that women might have done to prevent this outcome, so it’s probably more of a story used to shift blame when a baby comes out physically imperfect.

**Baby Folk Beliefs (FA 01 2208)**

Much folklore is dedicated to making parents less obnoxiously over attentive. Several pieces of lore come from older mothers, telling younger mothers that picking up a baby when it is crying makes it spoiled and dependent or that there is not actual purpose behind patting a baby’s back before
burping. The baby will naturally release any gas it has. While not always true, the sentiment might relax some especially frantic mothers.

Other folklore is dedicated to passing on remedies to common ailments. Croup, a sort of deep chested cough, may be alleviated by the introduction of cold air. One woman suggested sticking an ill baby’s face in the open freezer and allowing it to breathe the cold air. Other ways of lessening the cough deal with medicine. A baby with ‘croup’ can be aided by putting a pan of boiling water with ‘mentholatum’ dissolved in it in the baby’s room. Mentholatum is not safe for children to ingest though, so mothers attempting to use it should be very careful.

A baby with an upset stomach should be fed an entire bottle of lukewarm water to settle its stomach and allow it to sleep. Earaches can be cured with onion juice dropped directly in the ear. If a baby has hiccups, the cure is a pacifier dipped in sugar. Unfortunately, sugar is not a good thing to feed babies, so though it’s a good remedy, it shouldn’t be used unless it’s a last resort. Too much sugar can cause tooth decay and sugar addiction.

Laying a colicky baby on its stomach on the running dryer will help it feel better, but the baby must be watched carefully in such a precarious position.