

# Old Wives Tales

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Entertainment

## Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of episode outline)

I've been psyching myself up for this one, because this is a fun topic and also I feel like last episode was kind of low energy, I'm suffering from severe insomnia right now and also doing a bunch of comedy shows and getting home late at night; I've been mentally depleted. So no promises as to how long my energy will last, I might start slurring my words halfway through. Although I perked up a bit last time as the episode went on, so you never know. I'm all about that second wind, so I just need to add a first wind and then I can be winded through the entire show...that doesn't really work. That saying doesn't make much sense. Before we get into our topic for today I do want to correct a mistake from last time; it wasn't in any of the researched segments, but last episode I did a lot of off-the-cuff bitching about a rich woman who gave a bunch of money to a dog, and I just want to clarify, I had not gotten very far in the documentary series at that point. Spoiler alert: The dog does not have \$400 million, despite what Netflix would lead you to

believe in the trailer and the first three episodes...they really dragged out the reveal. Each episode contradicts the last one and it's kind of infuriating. I guess it's my fault for assuming that the entire series was not based on a lie. It was the worst kind of plot twist, because it undermined the only reason I wanted to watch the stupid show in the first place. I came here for a bougie dog, dammit. I want to see German shepherds getting pedicures and lapping Dom Perignon out of golden bowls, but it turns out the entire series is about extremely self obsessed, extremely human billionaires and tax evasion. Less fun. It was not a plot twist that would have made our list of the top five, from last week's after midnight episode. And btw I was chatting in the discord and some insomniacs brought up that none of us mentioned the twilight zone, which is a huge miss. The famous "eye of the beholder" episode includes one of the most classic plot twists of all time. Also, black mirror deserved at least an honorary mention. Oops.

So on to today's topic. You could consider this a sister episode to "superstitions" from way back in 2020, episode 28, that's a real throwback. This is Old Wives Tales. Which are very *similar* to superstitions, but they're superstitions that have traditionally been dispensed as advice by crazy old ladies. Not necessarily married ladies; the old English word "W-I-F" could refer to a lady with a

spouse, but also could simply mean "woman." So for anyone who feels like this is a derogatory term targeting elderly married women, it is not, it's a derogatory term targeting *all* elderly women regardless of marital status. Don't underestimate the offensiveness of this term; its ageism and misogyny are broadly applicable. And the term absolutely IS offensive and also potentially misleading, because as a general rule it's a good idea to listen to the more seasoned people in your life. I prefer the term "seasoned" to old as I myself become more seasoned. And by the way this advice definitely has nothing to do with the fact that I am approaching the male equivalent of being an old wife. Soon we'll have to rename this podcast to Old Husband's Tales. But seriously, the older I get the more respect I have for people who are older than ME, I realize how much of a miracle it is to survive past your 40s, I've gotten in car accidents and drunkenly fallen down stairs and lived through massive earthquakes and floods and Covid, it's mind boggling to me that anyone makes it to 50, let alone their 80s and 90s. So, huge respect to the geriatric insomniacs out there. Listen to your elders, kids. And stay off my lawn. Of course, now I'm going to completely reverse course and contradict myself as I often do, because even as I'm praising the wisdom of the elderly I can't help but think about the sheer number of old people I've met who believe that Barack Obama is a Muslim terrorist, and that helps remind me to take

pretty much *any* advice with a grain of salt. Certainly don't blindly accept medical information from anyone who isn't a doctor. And many old wives tales *are* centered around medical advice, often for women; they frequently involve pregnancy, puberty and women's health, nutrition etc. This is probably due to a combination of factors: first, blatant societal misogyny. Before the modern era very few doctors were female, and thus the medical community wasn't making much of an effort to study and/or disseminate information about female healthcare. Plus, women suffered from disproportionately high rates of illiteracy, so the majority of them wouldn't have been able to access that information even in the rare cases where it was available. Women in the past frequently relied on the oral tradition...when you can't read, all of the wisdom you gain or disperse has to be passed down verbally, and there was no way to cross reference or fact check any of it in a library or with an encyclopedia, so generations of women had to rely on what they were told by their mothers and grandmothers. I'd imagine that Old Wives Tales also benefit from an element of confirmation bias; one of the reasons that these myths persist is because as people get older they become more and more convinced that all of the things they did in their lives and all of the advice that they followed must've been correct, because hey, it worked for *them*. They ignore the millions of people who

followed similar advice and dropped dead. So like you ate an apple a day and kept the doctor away, and you just assume that all of your friends that died must have been a bunch of dumb apple-haters.

Obviously, bad advice has been around for a loooong time, and blaming it on old ladies isn't a new phenomenon. The idea of the "Old Wives Tale" is included in various versions of the Bible, in the 1611 translation of the King James Bible, Timothy verse one: "But refuse profane and old wives' fables and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." The Bible is always very eloquent when throwing shade. Listen to the lord, not your wacky Aunt Phyllis. I love insults in old English, I wish we still talked that way. "Thy mother is of such legendary girth that the earth doth shake at her stride."

So let's dive into some classic Old Wives Tales.

### **Coffee does not stunt your growth**

There is no evidence that coffee or caffeine will affect your height. The myth seems to come from outdated research indicating that caffeine can contribute to osteoporosis, reducing bone density over time, but further study has not replicated those results, and it would have to be some pretty extreme bone-density-loss to affect height. It's more likely that the original findings are the result of correlation

rather than causation; people who consume a lot of coffee are less likely to consume much vitamin D. And as you probably know from every milk commercial ever, Vitamin D is a vital component of bone growth. Now, consuming vitamin D as a kid won't necessarily make you taller, but lack of it will make it a lot harder to reach your genetically determined height. So if your kid is guzzling coffee instead of milk during his cigarette breaks down at the factory or whatever, that's a problem, but the problem is the lack of vitamin D and not the presence of coffee. And also parental neglect, that's a problem too. If your kid is drinking a lot of coffee we might wanna get CPS involved. Regardless, it's a good idea for kids to avoid caffeine for so many obvious reasons. Maybe one explanation for the old wives tale about coffee affecting height is that it provided a justification for keeping kids away from the jumpy juice. Kids are hyper enough without any chemical assistance.

### **You can't catch a cold from having wet hair. Or from being cold.**

Colds are viruses, and the only way you can catch a virus by being exposed to it. Many of us found this out during quarantine, when we isolated and social distanced and didn't get sick for like two years because we didn't swap germs with anyone outside of our bubble. I didn't even get the sniffles during

quarantine, even though I spent plenty of time jogging on the cold ass beach with wet hair. Now there *is* a connection between cold-weather and *rates* of sickness, because researchers have found that cold-weather can suppress your immune system and the natural responses that allow your body to fight off viruses, so you may be more *likely* to get sick from a virus if you're shivering like a Chihuahua, but viruses can't simply pop into existence because it's cold. This isn't Harry Potter. You can't wizard a cough into existence or curse someone with the flu. Catchitus Virusay Mucusolous!

**Peeing on a jellyfish sting will not do anything except humiliate everyone involved.**

As we have discussed in previous episodes, jellyfish stings can be excruciating. Many species of jellyfish defend themselves with tiny barbed cells called nematocysts that attach to the skin and then rupture to release potent venom. The effects last for hours, and can result in scarring or death.

One of the most popular and persistent old wives tales is that you can piss on a jellyfish sting to neutralize the venom. I've tried to figure out where this came from, and it seems to have been a suggestion based on the ammonia and salt in urine, but there doesn't seem to be a reliable source for the origin story or any explanation as to why people

thought ammonia and salt would work. I can only assume there's old wives tale was popularized by someone with a kink who lived by the ocean and regularly wandered the beach dispensing false information and golden showers. We actually mentioned this old wives tale in our dangerous animals episode, when we discussed box jellyfish.

Not only is urine incapable of counteracting the effects of a jellyfish sting, the chemical composition of urine fluctuates based on what you ate that particular day. So there could be compounds in your urine that trigger even more pain and unpleasantness. I imagine if you ate asparagus, the experience is going to be especially unpleasant; probably won't have any effect on the amount of physical pain, but it will definitely increase the amount of emotional pain. Mental scars can last longer than physical ones.

So what DOES work? Vinegar can deactivate the stingers, so hopefully you brought some salad dressing to the beach? I don't know, I was really hoping the pee thing was true because the rest of this advice isn't going to be very practical either. Like, don't bother with ice, which is probably readily available from a beer cooler or something but it preserves the venom and may prolong or exacerbate the effects. Instead, your best option is heat. Heat actually deactivates the venom of some of the worst offenders like box jellyfish and man-of-war. So if you get stung by a jellyfish, pluck off



the stingers, using tweezers and then apply some Newman's own Italian dressing or whatever form of portable vinegar you randomly keep on your person for beach days—I don't you know about you but the two things I never leave the house without are vinegar and tweezers—and then for heat...I guess rub other parts of your warm body all over the affected area? Probably don't do that, although I don't know how else you're supposed to apply heat at the ocean other than the sun. The heat source needs to be over 100 degrees, so if there is a restroom nearby, hot water will do the trick assuming you've successfully removed all of the stingers.

Also you shouldn't try to rub the affected area with sand or use a credit card to scrape off the stingers. The credit card thing is a commonly suggested terrible idea that is frequently repeated even by reputable sources, but is ill advised because it can cause the stingers to rupture and release more venom.

### **An apple a day doesn't keep the doctor away**

I mean obviously apples aren't bad for you. And they can be very tasty. And there may even be truth to the idea that people who eat an apple a day are less likely to go to the doctor, but that's probably because the type of people who eat an apple every day are generally more health conscious than those who don't. An apple a day is certainly going to help keep the doctor away if the alternative is a Big Mac.

But the idea that apples are some kind of magical superfood can be debunked with the tiniest application of logic. You just have to ask: are apples even the healthiest of fruits? If they're not, then it's a stupid saying; if an apple isn't even the healthiest readily available fruit, then why aren't we recommending a better option. And as you might guess, most scientists would NOT rank apples as the healthiest fruit. Scientists typically determine the healthiness of a food looking at the number of vitamins and minerals it contains versus the blood sugar boost; basically a healthy food should be relatively low in calories but packed with nutrients. In 2014 the CDC released a list of so-called powerhouse foods, fruits and vegetables that would provide robust protection against disease and infection. The foods had to provide at least 10% daily value of at least 17 nutrients and minerals per 100 calories...Apples didn't even make the list. Lemons were the top scoring fruit, and it makes sense that citrus would boost your immune system with their high concentration of vitamin C, plus lemons are high in potassium, antioxidants, and are low in calories. And delicious. You might complain a bit about the idea of snacking on a nice juicy lemon, but strawberries were the next highest scoring fruit. Followed by oranges, limes, blackberries, and grapefruit. Overall on the list, beyond just the fruit, watercress came out on top. But "Some watercress every day keeps the

doctor away" isn't quite as catchy. Are you familiar with watercress? It's a leafy green that looks kind of like miners' lettuce and is in the cabbage family, native to Asia and Europe. The town of Alresford in England bills itself as the watercress capital, and its annual watercress festival hosts more than 15,000 weirdos every year. Very healthy weirdos. One of the big attractions is the watercress railway line, a 10 mile long stretch of track that connects Alton to Alresford, so you're welcome. I'm assuming the insomniacs are booking their tickets now. The happiest place on earth. The least flavorful happiest place on earth. Incidentally, Bananas have less sugar and more protein than apples, so you could say a banana a day keeps the doctor away and that somehow sounds dirty. Bananas are too phallic to take seriously in any context. It's not the banana's fault, but they share the fate of the cucumber and the eggplant; they'll never not be funny.

**You can cross your eyes without worrying they'll get stuck like that.**

Strabismus is the official name of the medical condition that we commonly refer to as being "cross-eyed." It's a condition that you're born with, not one that you can develop based on any particular activity, and it's generally correctable using lenses and/or eye exercises. If you cross your eyes your eyes might get tired, that happens, but there's no muscular mechanism that can make your eyes freeze in that position. I guess you

could get the optical equivalent of a Charlie horse or something, eye cramps wouldn't be pleasant, but they'll pass.

While we're on the topic of eyes, everyone knows the old wives tale that eating carrots improves vision.

Supposedly the myth was the result of military propaganda created by the British in WWII. They didn't want the Nazis to know that they were using radar, and so they propagated the idea that British soldiers had been scarfing carrots and could see in the dark. I don't know if the Germans believed it but the British public did, and it entered pop-culture infamy. Eating carrots is generally a good idea, carrots are packed with nutrients including vitamin A (aka retinol), and it's true that in extreme cases vitamin A deficiency can result in blindness.

So if you have a major vitamin A deficiency, eating carrots would certainly address that, but the same is true of any other vegetable that contains similar nutrients. There is actually more vitamin A in beef liver than in carrots, so that's another option if you don't enjoy carrots and instead prefer foods that are disgusting.

One Old Wives Tale that *is* true: if you eat a ton of carrots, the beta-carotene can give your skin an orange tint. It's a phenomenon called carotenemia, which just feels like scientific laziness. The fact that every aspect of a carrot has the word carrot in it displays a truly spectacular lack of creativity.

Those carrot researchers were uninspired. And by the way, we'll talk about more *true* Old Wives Tales at the end.

### **Medical professionals do not believe that you have to wait at least 30 minutes after eating eating before swimming**

So this is one I'd always heard, and even though it has been reportedly debunked I'm just going to live like it's true. Because I'm pretty sure it's true for me. So the myth comes from the idea is that while you're digesting your food, blood will move from your limbs to your stomach, and I guess make you weaker? In that case you'd think that people would swim more weakly and slowly after they've eaten. But "a 1962 study had subjects swim 100 yards freestyle at various times (0.5, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, and 3 hours) after eating and found no significant difference between times. What if we examine the heart itself? [A 1961 study](#) looked for changes in electrocardiograms following distension of the stomach, either by a large meal or a balloon and found no changes compared to before eating or ballooning." Additionally, according to the Red Cross scientific counsel there are no documented cases of drowning caused directly by swimming after eating. Which is kind of a weird thing to claim, because I'm sure some people who have drowned ate before they drowned, and it's a little tough to ask them what caused them to lose buoyancy. But ok.

The more likely culprit and the reason

I'm sticking to this regardless of supposed debunking, is cramps. And this is something that is mentioned in a lot of articles and kind of dismissed but not convincingly as far as I'm concerned, the idea of you getting a stitch in your side is not weird and it's definitely science. If I go jogging within an hour of eating a meal I'll get crippling cramps in my side. Science apparently insists that there's no connection between eating and exercise and cramps and that's totally fine, it might be something that only affects a small segment of the population but I'm part of that segment. I'm a segment of that segment. Maybe it's a population of 1, but yeah, it's a thing. There are medical conditions that only affect a tiny percentage of people but that doesn't make them any less impactful to the people that are affected. Like I sneeze if I look at the sun. Always twice. Or a bright light. Basically if I'm in a dark area and then I look at a light or go out into a light area I'll sneeze twice. My stepdad still thinks I'm lying about that, but it's a real thing. Look it up. And so are cramps. Like this is not psychosomatic.

I would say it's unlikely that if I went swimming right after eating I would get a cramp so bad that I would not be able to at least swim back to shore, but the pain can be pretty intense and I'm not going to test that theory. So I'll just continue to ignore science and listen to the old wives tales that are told by my body. I will absolutely make fun of other people for ignoring

science, because I'm a hypocrite. At least I admit it.

### **Masturbation will not put hair on your palms.**

Trust me on this one. Not that I'm an expert, I've just done some casual research online. I watched some videos.

The myth that masturbation will cause hair to grow on your palms dates all the way back to the middle ages, and it was most likely a very deliberate lie intended to keep kids from spankin' it. That's one super persistent lie; shame is a powerful force. But clearly not powerful enough. The old wives tale has persisted and is very widespread, but not nearly as widespread as masturbating. If I were trying to come up with a deterrent for masturbating, it wouldn't be something that you could just shave off. Because that's not going to stop a teenage boy. Hair just adds more friction.

### **Feed a cold starve a fever**

Speaking of old wives tales that have been around for hundreds of years, this next one is a classic. "Feed a cold, starve a flu" dates back at least to a 1574 dictionary entry written by John Withals that said "fasting is a great remedy for fever." Presumably Withals was simply repeating conventional wisdom that had been around for generations by then.

Just to get this out of the way, you shouldn't starve any illness. Starvation

in general is not a good thing. Your body needs calories to survive and it needs calories and vitamins and nutrients to fight off any virus or infection, so while you don't typically need to force yourself to eat if you aren't hungry, you certainly shouldn't deprive yourself of sustenance. The idea might come from the fact that eating food creates energy which is basically "warmth" on a chemical level and so there was speculation that it would help when you have a "cold" and of course if you have a flu you're already hot due to fever so you don't need extra "warmth." Silly.

### **If you shave your hair it will not grow back thicker and faster.**

Hair is thicker at the base, so when it starts to grow back it temporarily looks thicker. And then as it gets longer it tapers toward the ends and looks just as thin and brittle as it did before. Sorry bald guys. I'll be joining you soon, so I'm bummed that this isn't true. But it seems pretty obvious that if this old wives tale worked, guys with thinning hair would just shave their heads over and over again until they had a luxurious mane. Men would go through hair phases; every few months they'd disappear into their man cave for a few weeks and start from scratch. It would be like hair-based hibernation. Guys would be marching in the streets to get paid vacation for hair-regrowth. There would be demonstrations for the rights of the follicle challenged. "paid vacation for hair regeneration."



## **If you swallow your gum it will not stay in your stomach for 7 years**

There has long been this wacky idea that chewing-gum will stick to the inside of your stomach, and the more gum you swallow the more it clumps together in a gummy ball like a grapefruit-sized gummy tumor in your stomach. Which is just bonkers. Honey is a lot more sticky than chewing gum, so why aren't we worried that our stomachs are going to be coated by increasingly thick walls of honey until your gut is just a churning ball of sticky sugar and any additional food you eat backs up to your esophagus and chokes you to death? Seems just as likely.

The myth presumably comes from the fact that gum doesn't break down in your mouth; you can keep masticating your gum for hours, which sounds dirty, but it's just a weird way to say that you can keep chewing gum over and over again without it disintegrating, and btw chewing gum is a noun and chewing gum is also an activity, which is sort of confusing . Anyway the fact that you can keep chewing gum...should I say chewing chewing gum? You can keep chewing your chewing gum for hours and it will never dissolve. Gum honestly is pretty gross if you take a minute to think about it. About a third of chewing gum consists of the gummy substance itself, known as gum base, and it's frankly kind of foul. The specific ingredients are mostly trade secrets

from the various chewing gum brands, but the FDA allows for 46 chemicals to be categorized as chewing gum base, including **styrene-butadiene rubbers (SBR)** which are rubbers that are derived from petroleum and are essentially the same as what you'd find in Goodyear car tires. Add in some resins and plasticizing materials, vegetable oils and fillers and sugars and waxes and boom! Trident.

Mmmm. Tasty rubbers and waxes.

But the fact that gum is undigestible doesn't mean it's going to stick in your gut, it just means you're not going to absorb it. It's still going to move through you, but it will remain intact.

Which is probably good because you don't need any of the weird chemicals and non-nutrients of chewing gum getting into your bloodstream.

Swallowing gum is very similar to swallowing a balloon full of cocaine.

Smugglers are counting on the fact that rubber is indigestible, meaning it will not be absorbed and broken down by the gut, and will simply exit your body in the same form and shape in which it entered. Hopefully intact. If you swallow a rubber balloon full of cocaine and then start getting real giddy on the airplane you know you have a problem. Which happened to a guy on a podcast that I listened to, it was pretty wild. He went into toxic shock but survived, what a lucky convict he now is. Since chewing gum is indigestible, presumably you could wrap cocaine in a bunch of pre-chewed chewing gum and swallow that. Lifehacks. You're welcome,

narcotic-trafficking Insomniacs.

Anyway the bottom line is that chewing gum won't stick in your gut, it will just take a quick tour through your intestines and then clog up the sewers instead of your stomach.

### **Putting a penny on a train track cannot derail a train.**

This old wives tale comes from the apparently common practice of putting pennies on train tracks to flatten them, which is a weird hobby but ok. This feels like something kids did in the 1930s, back when everyone under 16 was wearing suspenders and newsboy caps. The idea was that flat pennies were good luck, like a rabbit's foot I guess...? It's similar to throwing a penny in a wishing well, except in this case you're ensuring that no poor person can ever retrieve and spend that penny. It's good luck via spitefulness.

I actually really hate pennies, I've mentioned this before, they're filthy and useless (I'm very bougie) so I guess maybe putting pennies on train tracks is an act of pointless destruction that I kind of relate to. I'm generally in favor of removing pennies from circulation. But I'm rational enough to not try to torture them for being useless, and it's also wasteful. Just give them away. But don't hand them to a homeless person, because that feels insulting. Giving a homeless person a handful of pennies is diabolical. I feel like the only people who would do that are dressed like the planter's peanuts guy, with the

monocle and cane. Remember that video I showed you of the rich French women in 1899 tossing change to Vietnamese children like they were feeding pigeons? I haven't experienced that level of blind rage for a while.

I normally don't condone littering but in the rare cases when I have to use cash and I get change I throw pennies on the ground under the assumption that eventually someone will come along who is desperate enough to pick them up. And they can do it when no one is looking. I'm preserving their dignity by littering. I realize this doesn't make sense. Just let me live with my delusion.

Anyway there is no recorded instance of a train being derailed by pocket change. However, there have been a few cases of people getting killed by trains while they were doing stupid shit like laying pennies on train tracks, so maybe don't do that. pennies occasionally get their revenge. I take it all back, all of the disparaging remarks. We're cool, pennies.

### **There is no chemical which can reveal that someone is peeing in a pool**

I don't know if this one qualifies as an old wives tale but it's a really common myth and I'm not sure I should be busting it. Because I feel like this urban legend is kind of useful. But it's also a huge lie that I believed for many years. There is no chemical that will reveal the presence of urine in a public pool. Like there's this belief that if you

pee in a pool and they have a specific additive in there, all of a sudden the water around you will turn red or whatever, that's a blatant falsehood. There's no chemical pee-snitch that can tattle on a pool-defiler. But it's kind of a useful lie, and I think those of us who don't pee in pools want to believe that it's true. We just don't want to think that we are paddling around in the urine of children and a few particularly nasty adults, which we definitely are. I think we should all just decide to live as if those magical pee-snitching substances exist. Live as if the world is the way that you want it to be, rather than the way it is, you'll be much happier. Delusion is my happy place, as we have established. I think that's true for everyone.

### **Sitting Too Close to the TV Will Not Make You Go Blind**

There is a very specific source for this old wives tale. It is human nature to be suspicious of new technologies and as early as the dawn of the television era parents worried about how TV might be affecting their children psychologically and physically. But it wasn't until 1967 that their fears were temporarily justified. That was the year when routine testing revealed that some high-voltage "large screen" TVs (up to a gargantuan 27 inches) manufactured by G.E. were emitting x-ray radiation levels that exceeded government-mandated maximums. More testing revealed that the phenomenon wasn't limited to GE, the

total number of affected TVs from various manufacturers exceeded 100,000 sets. Why is it called a television set btw? There's only one. English is the worst.

So a recall was initiated, along with congressional hearings. It was a massive scandal. Finally the surgeon general released a statement declaring that there was no risk under "normal viewing conditions." In other words, don't watch TV with your face plastered to the screen and you'd be ok. A viewing distance of 6 feet was recommended. Further testing revealed that most of the radiation was aimed downward rather than straight ahead. But of course this was during the height of the Cold War and the public was always simmering with a low level of panic over the potential of nuclear war and any form of radiation was triggering. Parents had nightmares of genetic mutations caused by generations of close-up TV viewing. The resulting furor resulted in new regulations and spurred development of modern technologies, and as a result, contemporary television sets emit very little radiation.

I looked at some of those old TVs and wow, what's the opposite of nostalgia? I shuddered. Remember the TVs that were set in those giant cabinets, you had to physically walk over and turn the big chunky knob to access the three channels that worked, and you were always adjusting those damn metal rabbit ears and trying to get someone to stand there because the

only time they would show a clear picture was if someone was holding the antennas. So you would take turns watching Sesame Street while your friend held the antenna. That was an awful time to be alive; we can complain about social media or whatever but there's no way in hell I would go back to the dark ages of television technology.

### **Spicy foods cannot cause ulcers**

Ulcers are caused by a very specific gut bacteria called —and this is both true and awesome—*helicobacter pylori*. The name comes from the shape of the bacteria, which I was really hoping meant that it was shaped like a helicopter, but no, it's shaped like a helix. It is helical in shape. So disappointing. The helix shape allows it to penetrate the mucoid lining of the stomach, which is gross. This thing burrows into your tummy spot. It would be way cooler if the helicopter shape allowed it to zoom around your gut like a tomahawk chopper.

Now the reason people believed that ulcers are caused by spicy food is obvious: ulcers tend to act up when you eat spicy food. The connection seems logical: eat spicy food, feel stomach pain in the form of an ulcer, but the relationship between these two things is being misinterpreted. Ulcers are *triggered* by spicy food, but they aren't caused by spicy food. Don't blame spicy food for your gut bacteria situation.

**Did you ever hear the one about how eating a watermelon seed could potentially make a watermelon sprout in your belly?**

This one is just stupid and I don't really know what to say about it.

People say crazy shit and kids sometimes believe crazy shit. This feels like something that was spread around a schoolyard.

There are a bunch of old wives tales about pregnancy, as I mentioned old wives tend to believe they have a lot of wisdom about lady parts, which would seem to make sense considering they have lady parts, except that these old wives are often shockingly wrong. For instance, the idea that you can tell the gender of a child by whether the baby is being carried high or

low. Supposedly if you are carrying high it's going to be a girl. There's not much to say about this one except that it's just not true. The height at which you're carrying your baby just has to do with the way the baby is laying inside the uterus. Like if it's aligned normally or reclining like a G. It's propped up on one elbow smoking a stogie like the kid from Roger rabbit.

There is also this idea that cats will kill a baby by sucking away its breath, or in the less paranormal version of the myth, that they simply intentionally smother babies out of evilness or jealousy. The myth dates back at least 300 years to a publication called the



annual register which collected strange or interesting events, and included a death notice from Plymouth Massachusetts dated January 25, 1791. "A child of eighteen months old was found dead near Plymouth; and it appeared, on the coroner's inquest, that the child died in consequence of a cat sucking its breath, thereby occasioning a strangulation." That's a one and a half year-old kid, BTW, that's not a newborn. Seems highly unlikely that an almost 2 year old kid couldn't push a cat off its face, but whatever.

Cats of course do like to lay on warm surfaces—they have definitely laid on my face at night, and I guess a really tiny baby might not be able to shove the cat off, or even bite or something, so i guess there is a practical reason for spreading this idea. It's not true that cats are plotting to kill your baby but it's theoretically possible that they could do it accidentally and it's absolutely true they won't feel bad about it. Cats are not malicious but they don't have a conscience, nor regrets. So it can't hurt to keep the cat out of the baby's room at night, mostly just so you don't have to stress about it. Nine times out of 10 when we do stupid things that we know are pointless we do them because better safe than sorry. Like not eating before swimming. I do what I want.

## TRUE TALES

There are some "old wives tales" that have turned out to contain at least a grain of truth. I always wondered about some of these. Like "red sky at night, sailors delight." Both Shakespeare and the Bible contain references to this old adage. From Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*:  
"Like a red morn that ever yet betokened, Wreck to the seaman, tempest to the field, Sorrow to the shepherds, woe unto the birds, Gusts and foul flaws to herdmen and to herds."

And in the Bible, from Matthew six. Jesus says, "When in evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: For the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today; for the sky is red and lowering."

Apparently it's true in certain parts of the world that if there is red sky at sunset there's a good chance that the weather will be calm the following day, and vice versa...red sky at morning, you might be in for some trouble. In temperate zones, weather systems typically move from west to east.

When the sun is setting in the west, it is sending its light through the thickest part of the atmosphere, basically giving you a snapshot of the atmospheric conditions in the west. If the atmosphere is condensed with particles of water vapor and dust, that means a high-pressure system is causing those particles to get caught in the sky, dissipating the blue light and leaving the red. High pressure

systems indicate good weather, while low pressure systems can indicate storms. So with a red sky at sunset you're getting a snapshot of good weather coming your way. On the other hand when the sun rises in the east, if you're getting that red coloration, it's the opposite. A low pressure system is probably eminent. However this doesn't work at the tropics, where weather tends to move in the opposite direction.

Peanut butter will actually help remove gum from your hair. Gum is hydrophobic, it's not going to be dissolved by water, but peanut butter, which is also hydrophobic, can break down that delicious petroleum-rubbery gum base that we discussed earlier. Just make sure you have access to a shower because having peanut butter in your hair is significantly messier than gum. You're really not improving your predicament initially, it's a long-term strategy. If peanut butter doesn't work, try whipped cream, and sprinkles. The sprinkles are the key. Also mayonnaise. I just want to see how much of a Southern picnic we could load into someone's hair. The peanut butter thing is true, though.

Walnuts can be used to fill in scratches on a wood floor. Walnuts contain oils and natural coloring that often match the floor color, so it's worth a shot if you have a few light scratches. If one of your kids ice

skated across your living room, you're probably out of luck. It's not going to fill in grooves and channels, your living room Grand Canyon is a lost cause.

Another old wives tale that seems to be grounded in truth is the idea that male babies will typically result in longer labors than female babies. The rationale is obvious when you think about it. On average boys are heavier and have larger heads, they're like a boss battle for the vagina.

Putting a wooden spoon on top of a boiling pot will keep it from boiling over. The wooden spoon is going to be cooler than the heat of the water, causing the bubbles to pop and re-condense into water, which is heavier than bubbles and pushes down the layer of bubbles that was rising. A wooden spoon is also hydrophobic, which also contributes to popping of bubbles.

Hot baths can indeed cause infertility in men. It's temporary, and I think most of us know by now that there's some truth to this, because men are routinely told by medical professionals to stay out of hot tubs if they are trying to conceive. From a 2007 article from UCSF: "It has been believed for decades that wet heat exposure is bad for fertility, as an old wives' tale, but this effect has rarely been documented... now have actual evidence to show patients that these recreational activities are a real risk factor for male infertility." According to

male infertility specialist doctor Kelli Gross—which is a great name for a doctor who talks a lot about balls—“... the reason why is because sperm really likes the cooler temperature of the testicles. The testicles are outside of the body. They're about four degrees cooler than the rest of the body. And things like hot tubs, that increases the heat and the sperm just doesn't work as well, isn't produced as well.” I didn't realize the point of the scrotum was to separate your balls from your abdomen, but that makes sense. I guess I never thought about it, surprisingly I haven't ruminated on my scrotum. Sounds like a medical procedure. We're going to have to ruminare your scrotum.

Dr. Gross continues, “People are surprised that those effects last about three months. Seventy-four days is the lifecycle of the sperm, so going in the hot tub once is going to potentially affect your fertility for the next three months.” Wow. So if you're trying to do the thing that leads to conception without any conception, you should routinely soak your balls in boiling water. No, not boiling, but hot tubs couldn't hurt. But still also use condoms and other forms of protection. The hot tub birth control method is a really fun, relaxing, and therapeutic technique for becoming a dad.

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