

Confinement traditions

MATERNITY

Addressing the top three concerns during the postpartum period

There are many preconceived notions surrounding the confinement period, which many fellow mummies observe during the month following their baby's birth. TCM physician Kuai Hong (KH) and obstetrician Dr Crystal Chin (CC) shed light on some of these myths from both an Eastern and Western perspective to help mothers stay informed as they regain postpartum health.

Myth #1

YOU SHOULD NOT TURN ON THE AIR CONDITIONER

KH: Mothers should rest in a comfortable environment during the confinement period. Keep the room well-ventilated at a comfortable room temperature of around 26 degrees Celsius. This temperature ensures that mothers do not perspire excessively and are not overexposed to wind and chill. If turning on the air conditioner is necessary to maintain the room temperature, mothers and babies should be shielded from direct contact with the cold air.

CC: The hot and humid weather of Singapore may cause excessive sweating, which may elevate the mother's risk of wound infection. It is important to keep the room well-ventilated to reduce the risk of air-borne diseases. On the other hand, it is also easier to catch a cold if one allows sweat to evaporate and dry naturally in chilled air.

A cool, constant room temperature, such as an air-conditioned room, is ideal for both baby and mummy. To prevent catching a cold or falling ill, it is generally a good practice to not let air conditioning or cold air blow directly at the mothers during confinement since they have a lower immunity, as do their newborn babies.

Myth #2

YOU SHOULD NOT BATHE

KH: To prevent infections and to keep mothers energised and fresh, they should continue to shower during the confinement period as part of their daily hygiene routine. However, from a TCM perspective, the following points are recommended:

- **Use warm water to shower** – around 35 to 37 degrees Celsius.
- **Abstain from taking baths** or soaking in the bathtub.
- **Take short showers** – ideally around five to 10 minutes.
- **Dry off immediately** and clothe yourself before stepping out of the shower room.
- **Use a warm damp towel** to wipe down the body if there is a major perineal tear or C-section wound. Mothers may want to delay showering until the wound area is healed.

CC: It is fine to have a warm shower daily as basic hygiene is important. Whether it's body sponging or showering, it is imperative to keep clean. Otherwise, the risk of infection for a caesarean or perineal wound will increase due to the accumulation of bacteria on the skin.

Myth #3

YOU SHOULD NOT DRINK WATER, ONLY LONGAN RED DATE TEA

KH: To have sufficient milk supply, mums should ensure they are properly hydrated during the whole breastfeeding period. From a TCM perspective, longan red date tea is highly beneficial for postnatal recovery. It is a good source of iron to replenish the blood supply, and it can help warm the body for healthy circulation. However, as long as their nutritional needs are met, mothers are encouraged to drink more fluids, warm water included.

CC: Keeping well hydrated is important at any time, and breastfeeding and lochia (afterbirth discharge) loss require extra fluid intake.

Plain warm water is fine for the body. Longan red date tea contains increased calories and sugar, and it should not be used to replace water intake completely, especially for diabetic mummies.

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