

# Food Myths

You may have heard that eating crab while pregnant will cause you to have an active child or that not satisfying your pregnancy cravings will give you a greedy child, is there any truth in this? **MH** sets out to debunk these myths and more.

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**A** Singaporean woman, when pregnant, often finds herself receiving a plethora of suggestions from family, friends and extended relatives on what she should and should not eat to best take care of herself during pregnancy. Some of that advice, while steeped in a whole lot of goodwill, may seem...downright extraordinary! Been at the receiving end and wondering whether to believe your Aunt when she stops you from indulging in your favourite fruit claiming it'll cause a miscarriage?

We check in with our experts, Bibi Chia, principal dietitian at Raffles Diabetes and Endocrine Centre and Jaclyn Reutens, dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants on some of the more common 'old wives tales', and get you the down low on whether any of it is based in fact.

**“Eating crab while pregnant will cause you to have an active child.”**

**TOTAL MYTH.** “There is no scientific proof to show the association between crab and an active child. Pregnant mums should eat a balanced diet with a variety of food. However, it is important to cook the food thoroughly to avoid food poisoning,” says Chia.

Reutens agrees, saying that a child's activity level has no relation to any foods you consume during pregnancy. “The origin of this tale is simply that crabs are active crustaceans as seen by their scuttling movements and snapping pincers, so they are believed to impart that active movements to the growing foetus in Chinese folktales.”

**“Don't eat pineapple, barley, oats, papayas or durians in early pregnancy as they may encourage miscarriage.”**

According to Chia, this is a **TOTAL MYTH**. “There is no documented case

of miscarriage from eating these foods. Remember, eating a healthy and well-balanced diet is the best way to obtain optimal nutrition during pregnancy!” she says.

While Reutens agrees that barley, oats and papaya fall under the **TOTAL MYTH** category, she says there may be **SOME TRUTH** to that claim with regards to Pineapples. “Pineapple contains an enzyme called Bromelain that thins the blood and increases the risk of bleeding. However, eating reasonable amounts of pineapple is safe. One serving is a wedge of pineapple (~100-150g). Pineapple is also a source of vitamin C and dietary fibre.”

**“Eat well and allow some indulgence. Not satisfying your pregnancy cravings will give you a greedy child!”**

This one is bane to the ears of any woman fighting a losing battle to control her diet, especially if you have a live-in mother (or mother-in-law) who seems to enjoy force-feeding you.

Don't worry ladies; our experts agree that this is **TOTAL MYTH**. “There is no link or relation whatsoever here! How could you prove this?” says Reutens.

**“Having a sweet tooth likely means you are having a baby girl while having oily and meaty food cravings most likely mean you are having a baby boy.”**

Reutens says this is **TOTAL MYTH**. “The origin of this tale could have been that desserts are seen as something more delicate and sweet which best describes a girl and meat may be viewed as muscle and toughness, describing a boy,” she posits.



Chia says that this tale **REMAINS UNPROVEN EITHER WAY**. “Cravings may be due to hormonal changes that alter mum's sense of taste and smell, or, they may be due to temporary nutritional deficiencies but there is no concrete evidence to prove or disprove this claim,” she adds.

**“Don't eat too much seafood as baby may get rashes.”**

**TOTAL MYTH.** “There is no evidence that eating seafood during pregnancy cause skin problems for the baby. Seafood is a good source of protein, iron and zinc which are important nutrients for your baby's growth and development. Deep-sea fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, sardine and tuna are also good sources of omega-3 fatty acids, which are important for your baby's brain and eye development. To prevent food poisoning or foodborne illnesses during pregnancy, cook seafood thoroughly and make sure that they are freshly-prepared,” says Chia.

**UNPROVEN EITHER WAY.** “Seafood contains certain proteins that are hypoallergenic which is why children and adults can become allergic to seafood. However, it is unproven that consumption of seafood will cause your baby to have rashes. Seafood is still a source of protein, zinc and other essential minerals. Eat them fully cooked,” agrees Reutens.





“Drinking lots of coconut water and eating ladyfingers close to the delivery date will ease delivery. Also, eating whatever you want close to your due date satisfies baby and makes him ready to come out.”

Both experts agree that this is **TOTAL MYTH**. Reutens says, “The ease of delivery depends on many factors such as regular pregnancy-appropriate exercise, overall good nutrition and stress management. It is definitely not related to particular foods or drinks.”

Chia adds, “Although there are no studies on the association between coconut water, lady fingers and easy delivery, consume them as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Coconut water contains nutrients such as fibre, potassium and electrolytes and can be taken in moderation to refresh and hydrate pregnant mums. Ladyfingers are a great source of fibre and folate which are essential for both mummies and babies.”

“The foods you crave or eat more of during your pregnancy are going to be baby’s favourites.”

**REMAINS UNPROVEN.** Both our experts agree that there is a small possibility of some truth to this one. “There is no real evidence but some studies have shown that the food choices you made during pregnancy may shape baby’s food preferences later in life,” says Chia.

“Yes, there is a very small possibility,” agrees Reutens. “If you give into your cravings often, your amniotic fluid may contain the remnant flavouring molecules which your baby is exposed to. For example, if you crave sweets and desserts often and end up giving in to it, your amniotic fluid will be ‘sweeter’. Nonetheless, it remains unproven. Eating habits and preferences are largely developed once the baby is born.”

“Eating watermelon while pregnant might make you too ‘cold’ inside the body.”

While Chia asserts that this is **TOTAL MYTH**, Reutens says there might be **SOME TRUTH** to this one. She posits that the origin of this claim lies in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) beliefs. They believe that ‘cold’ foods like watermelon cause lack of circulation around the abdomen and uterus. Your womb is the incubator for your baby and should be kept warm. Chia, however, stresses that having a balanced diet which includes fruit and vegetables is essential for a healthy pregnancy and to avoid constipation.

“Drinking white milk or soya will give you a fairer child and dark drinks like chocolate milk will give you a darker baby.”

**TOTAL MYTH.** “I’ve heard this many times and it’s hilarious! The idea is that dark pigments in the foods will be absorbed into the baby’s skin. The reverse of this myth, that drinking soya milk or eating tofu will give your baby

smoother and whiter skin is equally untrue. The truth is that your baby’s skin colour is genetically determined,” says Reutens.

Chia agrees, adding, “Dark chocolate is beneficial due to their antioxidant properties and milk helps to meet both mother and child’s calcium and protein needs. However, according to the *American journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, it is recommended to limit caffeine intake, found in tea, coffee and chocolate, to 200mg because caffeine may hinder iron absorption which is essential for the red blood cell development and to prevent the mother from experiencing depression.”

Although it’s a pity that you can’t influence your child’s skin colour, the resounding message from our experts is not to worry so much about certain foods causing various effects. Rather, eat everything in moderation and balance for a healthy pregnancy and happy baby. Happy eating! 🍴



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