

# Filipino Culture

## Traditional Health Beliefs: Filipino: Pregnancy & Childbirth

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**IMPORTANT: The information contained on these pages are intended to inform the reader about traditional health beliefs, and are based upon interviews with women of the Filipino culture. The information is not intended to be diagnostic or used for self treatment. If you are pregnant or in need of medical assistance, please seek help from a professional health care provider.**

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Upon interviewing Filipino women, we have come to see that many of these women still uphold some traditions from previous generations, but have since transitioned into a more modern approach regarding their maternity experience.

### Prenatal

When asking questions regarding the prenatal period, many of these women recalled traditions upheld by previous generations.

These traditions consisted of :

- The people a woman turned to for prenatal care were midwives and women who were experienced in child birth
- During health screenings, the woman was not accompanied by her significant other, instead she was accompanied by a female family member
- To encourage the well being of both the mother and her child:
  - The mother was encouraged to eat lots of rice, Mungo Beans (Balatong), and Pinakbet (Vegetable Soup) to promote healthy eating
  - She was also encouraged to eat raw eggs to build strength for labor, pigs tail to promote fetal movement, and Calamansi (a small tropical citrus fruit) so that the newborn's face would be smooth
  - She was advised to refrain from eating taro because it would cause her perineal area to become itchy
  - A mother was discouraged from wearing anything around her neck because it would cause the fetus' umbilical cord to wrap around it's neck.
  - She was advised not to watch scary movies because it could cause her to go into pre-term labor.
  - She was also advised not to think negatively towards a person because it would cause the baby to resemble that person.

- It was believed that cleaning the toilet would cause the baby to be cute
  - If a mother was told that her child was in the breech position, her significant other should walk down a flight of stairs, on all fours, with the head down so that the fetus would turn and be born normally
  - The mother was restricted from walking outside without footwear to prevent her from becoming ill
  - A mother was restricted from wearing tight-fitted clothing because it could cause the fetus to become handicapped
  - A mother was told to rub coconut oil onto her abdomen to prevent the formation of stretch marks.
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- To determine if the child would be male or female

Male	Female
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mothers stomach was set high and is pointy in contour</li> <li>• The mother retained her beauty throughout her pregnancy</li> <li>• When walking, the mother would step with her left foot first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mothers stomach is set lower and is more round in contour</li> <li>• Malasma (the mask of pregnancy) or swelling occurred because it was said that the mothers beauty was given to/stolen by her child</li> <li>• When walking, the mother would step with her right foot first</li> </ul>

As we continued to gather information regarding prenatal experiences, we discovered these women have incorporated the traditional and modern Filipino approaches to prenatal care.



- Each woman differed in how she found out she was pregnant. One woman was told that she had a "mother's glow," another was told she was four months pregnant by a massage therapist, and the last woman experienced nausea.
- Upon finding that they were pregnant, these women turned to Health Care professionals (Doctor or Nurse Midwife) for Prenatal care
- During health screenings, their significant others or close family member were able to actively participate
- To promote the well being of both the mother and her child, these women:
  - Maintained a healthy diet and refrained from eating fast foods
  - Took prenatal vitamins prescribed by their health care provider
  - Attended routine visits with their physician
  - Exercised, not only to maintain their health, but also to help in the ease of child birth
- These women also carried on some of their cultural traditions such as:
  - Eating a lot of rice, Mungo Beans (Balatong), and Pinakbet (Vegetable Soup) to promote healthy eating
  - Making sure not to wear anything around the neck because it would cause the fetus' umbilical cord to wrap around its neck.
  - Not watching scary movies to prevent from going into pre-term labor.
  - Making sure not to think negatively towards a person to prevent from the baby resembling that person.
  - Always wore footwear outside to prevent from becoming ill
  - Rubbed coconut oil onto the abdomen to prevent the formation of stretch marks.

## Labor and Delivery

Traditional ways during the labor and delivery of the child:

- Women from previous generations gave birth within their own homes.
- Aside from the person who was to deliver the baby, only women of the family were present during labor and delivery.
- Ginger was either applied onto the stomach or boiled in water for the woman to drink to help ease the pain
- The women endured the pain silently
- The placenta was buried or hung, with the child's name written on a piece of paper so that he/she would become intelligent
- The umbilical cord was wrapped in cotton and hung over a window to prevent the child from having colic or frequent stomach aches
- Families preferred to have boys born first, so that once old enough, he could help with the family farm

Three of the four women interviewed, chose the modern day approach of giving birth in a hospital setting, while the fourth woman opted for a home birth with the guidance of a lay mid-wife and other female family members. One woman stated that she remained

silent throughout her labor and delivery, and also endured the pain naturally, while the others received the epidural. Half of the women interviewed stated that they wished for girls to be born first, while the other half did not have a preference of whether the first child was to be a boy or girl. These women stated that although they chose the modern day approach, they still carried on some of the Filipino traditions.

Delivering in a hospital setting greatly influenced the traditions that were practiced by the Filipino culture. During the era of these women, the number of people allowed into the birthing room were restricted to the spouse and medical staff members. Allowing the placenta to be given to the mother was never discussed during labor and delivery.

## Post Partum



Because modern day post partum practices were more lenient, unlike prenatal and labor and delivery, much of the care during the post partal period reflected the traditional customs.

These women still had a recovery period of one month with other family members assisting in cleaning and cooking so that they could have the time to heal and rest in bed. When in need of guidance, these women followed their custom and turned to experienced women in the family, but have also included the support of their significant other. Some refrained from hair washing for about one month to prevent excessive heat loss, which would cause the head to shake. They refrained from bringing the newborn out for about a month and only drank warm water to prevent illness. Their children carry on the tradition of using their mother's maiden name as their middle name and using their father's last name as their own. Some of these children's names were a combination of both their parent's names. Some parents chose to use names of grandparents to ensure a name passes on from generation to generation or to honor a grandparent. The only

custom that was not followed was the lighting of small fires around the bed while the mother and newborn were in it, which was believed to promote strength as the mother healed and the newborn grew.

When asked how they felt regarding their experience with pregnancy, compared to women of previous generations, these women replied that they felt they were more fortunate in their experience due to having the aid of technology and advanced knowledge of modern day practices. These women were able to receive care from health care professionals, where as women from previous generations could only be aided by unlicensed midwives or other women experienced in child birth.

Due to the diversity of today's culture, both the traditional and modern day approaches have come together in what the women now view as a new baseline of traditional practices, which consists of a mixture between traditional Filipino customs and the influence of other cultural and modern day practices.



Re.: <http://www.hawcc.hawaii.edu/nursing/RNFilipino08.html>