

# 4 myths debunked about outdoor play and children's health

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Enough with the old wives' tales that have kept kids indoors long enough! It's time to fight back with facts.

There are all sorts of strange old wives' tales surrounding outdoor play and children. We shout things at our little ones, warning them of terrible health issues that could arise if they dare go outside with wet hair, with full bellies, with coats unzipped and hats off. These warning phrases have been repeated for generations, and are so ingrained in our minds that many of us younger parents reiterate them, without stopping to question whether or not they actually make sense.

The time has come to debunk these myths, because North American kids and their parents need every bit encouragement to spend time outside — not outdated and unfounded beliefs that make them think it's not safe.

## 1. Colds

Kids do not catch colds from the cold. The common cold is a “viral upper respiratory tract infection,” which means it comes from a virus, caught through contact with other humans. *If there are no viruses around, you will not catch a cold, no matter how cold you get.*

There is truth, however, in the fact that cold weather can impede the body's ability to fight off a cold and make it more susceptible to catching a cold when the child comes into contact with the virus.

Ironically, staying indoors usually means more contact with other people, which creates more opportunities for the pathogens to spread, as does decreased humidity (which dried out protective mucus in the nose) and reduced vitamin D.

If your kid does catch a cold, then don't make him to stay in bed. Even the National Center for Biotechnology Information states, "In winter, children with colds can still play outside."

## **2. Fever**

If your child has a low-grade fever, it won't make the fever worse to let him or her play outside. As long as a kid isn't too sick to get out of bed, they should be allowed to burn off some restless energy in fresh air for short periods of time. Pediatrician Andrew Adesman, author of *Babyfacts*, writes:

"People sometimes get a little nutty around fever; we go out of our way to suppress it. But fever is our friend; it's helping fight infection. And children can have a fever as high as 105 degrees without serious risk of harm. Parents also keep kids inside with fever, but those with a low-grade fever can go outside and play if they feel like it."

If outdoor play and fresh air helps a child to sleep better, then exposure could be beneficial. You could even let your feverish child sleep outdoors.

## **3. Cramps & Drowning**

I first discovered this myth when I moved to Sardinia, Italy. My host parents insisted that it was unsafe to swim, shower, or bathe for one hour after eating because I might get terrible cramps and drown or collapse on the shower floor. I'd never heard of such a thing before. It turns out, they're wrong.

While cramping after eating is indeed a possibility, there don't seem to be any links to drowning, nor do the American Academy of Pediatrics or the Red Cross acknowledge such a connection. From MedicineNet:

"While it's true that the digestive process does divert the circulation of the blood toward the gut and to a certain extent, away from the muscles, the fact is that an episode of drowning caused by swimming on a full stomach has never been documented."

## **4. Ear Infections**

If your child goes outside with their head uncovered, they will not develop an ear infection. They might just have a cold head. According to Dr. William Mesibov, who specializes in debunking old wives' tales about medical issues, ear infections are caused exclusively by germs. They occur in the middle ear, which is completely protected from the outside world, and are not the result of exposure to cold or windy environments.

"Germs invade the middle ear cavity only when mucus or swollen adenoids block the Eustachian tube. And that happens only as a result of a cold or allergies, not because of exposure to dampness or inclement weather." So, parents, you have nothing to fear, nor excuses to use! Send those kids outside to play all winter long.