

MAIL TODAY

# Doctor, my baby sneezed thrice

by Preetha Nair



Oormila Prahlad worries about her children's emotional development

**T**HEIR BAGS are packed. The Kumars are all set for their week-long trip to Shimla. Sunil Kumar's wife, Megha, agreed to the vacation only after their two-year-old son's paediatrician gave the go-ahead. The destination had to be cleared by him too.

Before getting into the car, Megha calls up her doctor once again and asks if it's okay for her son, Karan, to take a pony ride. Of the three bags packed with Karun's stuff, there's one that is precious — it has a complete sterilisation kit — sterilised toys, bed linen, and a week's supply of mineral water. When it comes to the safety of their children, parents do not think going the extra mile is over-doing it. "I think it's necessary to take precautions," says Megha. If anything, these parents wish they could do more for their children.

Likewise, every time radio jockey Parul Jain and her husband Ankur visit their three-month-old Arav's paediatrician, their list of queries runs into a couple of pages. From questions on vaccinations to the correct room temperature, the ideal time to take the child for an outing, the effect of fairy tales on a child's mental development and more. Her doubts, one would think, could drive the best doctors in the business up the wall. But Parul's paediatrician has more persistent patients than her.

Obsessive parenting seems to have reached a stage when Benjamin Spock — his book *Baby And Childcare* has been considered the Bible of all parents since the 1940s — is simply not enough. From the recent trend, it seems parents trust their friendly neighbourhood paediatricians far more than Spock.

Jain put her trust in the 24-hour helpline numbers of Fortis Hospital right after giving birth to her son. "It was a big relief for me in the first few weeks. A new mother gets unsolicited advice from many quarters but I feel it's always wise to go by what the doctor says," she says.

If the earlier generation relied on experience and instinct, today's urban parents, who want everything to be absolutely perfect, are ready to consult every expert to ensure that they are doing the right thing. In a world where women (and men) are struggling to cope with family and work pressure, no parent is leaving anything about the newborn to chance. A sick or unhappy baby would lead to more pressure added to the ones they have in life. And with so many theories and techniques on parenting doing the rounds, you can't really blame parents for being utterly confused in their bid to be the "world's best mom".

The worries could range from the number of times a baby sneezes in a day... to why they haven't learnt to roll over when others of the same age have managed to do it... parents go overboard, admits Jain. "Initially when my baby coughed thrice in 48 hours, I called the doctor. I used to get very worried and I would cry at the drop of a hat," recalls Jain.

Dr Babita Jain, head of paediatrics, Max Hospital, Gurgaon, is used to receiving calls at odd hours from worried parents. "The other day a mother called up me at 11.30 pm to ask if she could give her baby a banana at that hour!" They may be exasperated with such queries, but doctors feel it's always better to be safe than sorry. "Sometimes I do get a little irritated. But I can understand the worries of a parent too," says Dr Jain.

**W**ITH MOST nuclear families not having elderly family members to offer help or any trained hands to take care of the basic needs of a newborn, parents hardly have any option than to rely on the advice of doctors. And expert interaction scores over best-selling books



**Benjamin Spock would've had to write a book per parent if he were alive. Over-anxious parents leave nothing to chance when it comes to the 'right way' of bringing up their children**



Riya Mukherjee rubbishes certain claims by reputed parenting books and only goes by her instincts

when it's about making crucial choices.

But in doing that, parents sometimes also lose rationality and become overprotective. Dr A K Bhatnagar, consultant paediatrician, Fortis Hospital, says, "I receive phone calls every day with the silliest of queries but I also understand the parents' point of view."

Most doctors also feel that half-baked information that parents gather from the Internet poses a lot of danger. "If a doctor prescribes a medicine, parents search on the net to know about its side-effects. The Internet gives only partial information and doctors have to spend time explaining about the medicine to over-anxious parents," says Dr Deepak Sehgal, paediatrician, Phoenix Hospital.

Ask Dr Sakshi Karkra, paediatrician at Gangaram Hospital. "A parent came with a peculiar problem last week — her baby was touching his nose far too often in a day. For the 15 minutes while I was observing the child, the baby didn't touch his nose at all! But the mother

insisted I take a closer look," says Karkra.

One of the biggest worries of parents is of hygiene. "I certainly won't let my son play on the floor when he starts crawling. I have a mat brought from abroad and it will be sterilised before every use," says Parul Jain.

And even if the kid is three to four months-old, his emotional and psychological needs are also not far from a worried mother's mind. Oormila Prahlad, the mother of three-year-old Samara and 18-month old Aiden, is extremely sensitive to her children's emotional needs. "People call me a hyper-parent but I am paranoid about my children's emotional development. I think the first seven years of a child should be full of positive experiences. I want my children to be super-strong and super-confident when they grow up so that they make wise choices in the future," says Prahlad.

During her pregnancy, Prahlad had read so much literature that her doctor once jokingly said she should join his clinic after the

delivery. "I write to a few websites that offer expert guidance on bringing up kids. I consult child development specialists too," says Prahlad, whose take on bringing up her kids is fairly simple. "I don't care if my kids grow up to be cooks or plumbers. I just hope they have a healthy sense of self-worth. I want them to be happy and confident cooks and plumbers!"

**H**OWEVER, Dr Jain while admitting that it's only natural for first time parents to be a little obsessive and stressed, also warns of its ill effects. "First time parents are frightened and scared to handle problems. But they should try to be more relaxed because a stressed out mother will only cause stress to the baby," cautions Jain. That's the last thing parents want.

But there are other kinds of parents too. Riya Mukherjee, the mother of 18-month old Shaayari,

and the creative head of a radio channel, is what you may term as a "super cool" mom. A strong believer of instinctive parenting, Mukherjee shuns some of the methods prescribed by popular books, like not to attend to crying babies at night. "It will make the baby an emotional wreck," she says.

Divya Deswal, a child birth educator, finds a method to the madness of obsessive parenting. "To understand how and why new parents respond or react, we must look at the way most of them give birth. If the whole process is ridden with anxiety, it's only fair that parents display anxiety. But with right information and support, they become quite balanced," she reasons.

Gitika Jain, mother of four-month-old Prisha, swears by Divya's lessons of birthing and parenting. "Since doctors aren't available round the clock, I depend on Divya to clear my doubts," says Jain.

Whoever said parenting is no rocket science didn't know what he/she was talking about.

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