



# MODERN FOLKLORE

## Urban Legends, Old Wives' Tales, & Superstitions

Many years ago, a woman from New York City traveled to Cancun for a relaxing vacation. One afternoon while sunbathing on the beach, she fell asleep. As she snoozed, a spider bit her on the cheek. When she woke and felt sore, she thought it was just a sunburn. It slowly grew into a boil. She paid it little attention, however, until she was back home in New York. The woman noticed that the boil was growing itchier and itchier by the day. She finally relented and made a doctor's appointment. Once there, the doctor broke open the huge boil and hundreds of tiny spiders spilled out and scattered, crawling all over the woman's face and eyes, neck and body. Horrified, the woman went into shock and died of a heart attack.

Freaked out? Don't go cancelling your tropical vacation just yet. "Spiders, need I say, do not find the human body a suitable site for egg laying, and no actual case [of] anything like this can be found anywhere in scientific or medical literature," says Rob Crawford, arachnid expert at the University of Washington.

### Urban Legends

So why is it that you've heard a similar story about a boy in Minnesota who fell asleep after eating cookies in bed and woke up with an ant colony in his brain? Bodily insect infestations are actually quite a common theme in urban legends. The Spider Bite Boil and the Ant Colony Brain are both popular urban legends that continue to circulate as true despite the fact that they contain obvious warning signs of being urban legends.

An urban legend, sometimes called an urban myth, is a modern scary story. They're spread by word of mouth, and often the story evolves over time. One sign that a story is an urban legend is that many versions of the story exist that differ slightly. Details may change or become more exaggerated. The best urban legends are the perfect combination of believable yet unbelievable so that the person hearing – and retelling – the story believes it could actually be true.

In the age of Google, it might be hard to understand how urban legends like these are still circulating. But instead of slowing these modern myths down, the Internet has actually helped to spread new urban legends even faster through email forwards and viral social media posts (think – Slender Man). Though a number of websites exist for the purpose of collecting and, when necessary, discrediting these urban legends, not everyone uses them. It's simply human nature to enjoy hearing a sensational story and then later repeat it to someone else.



## Old Wives' Tales

Old wives' tales are another form of modern folklore that have been passed around and are generally believed to be true. An old wives' tale is often a one-line piece of advice. Unlike urban legends though, some old wives' tales are actually true. They are called old wives' tales because traditionally, these phrases were shared and spread by old women who were considered to be wise in their old age.

Here are two old wives' tales. One is true and one is not. See if you can figure out which is which.

*\*You should always wait 30 minutes after you eat before swimming, or you might drown.*

*\*Have a cold? Eat chicken soup and you'll feel better.*

Has your mother actually used the wait-to-swim rule on you? She was wrong. According to Dr. Charles Smith of the Family and Preventative Medicine Department at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, there is no medical evidence to support the myth.

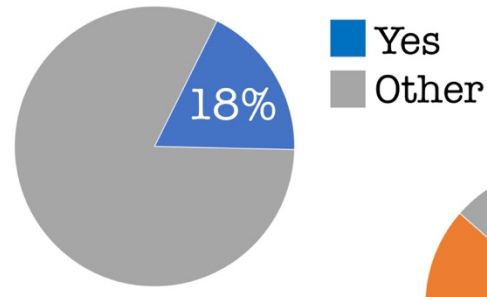
If you've ever been served chicken soup when you were feeling under the weather, be grateful. According to Dr. Stephen Rennard, a researcher at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, "chicken soup acts as an anti-inflammatory agent for your nasal cells, giving your nose the relief it needs." What's more, hot soups in general help keep nasal passages clear, prevent dehydration, and soothe a sore throat.

## Superstitions

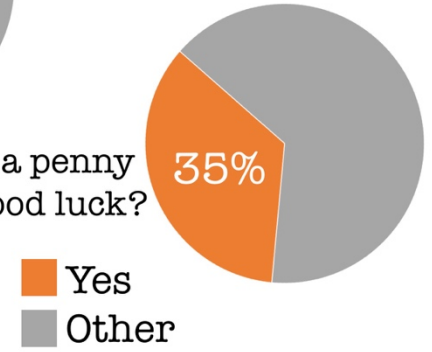
Unlike urban legends and old wives' tales, superstitions can be very personal. For example, if you're wearing a green t-shirt under your soccer uniform when you kick the winning goal, you might believe it's your lucky t-shirt. A superstitious person is likely to attribute one thing to something completely unrelated. In this case, the t-shirt is thought of as a good luck charm. Other common good luck charms include four-leaf clovers and rabbit's feet.

A superstition is an irrational belief in supernatural causation of events. While some

Are you superstitious?



Does picking up a penny bring you good luck?



Source: YouGov (2014)

While only 18% of Americans admit to being superstitious, 35% consider picking up a penny to be good luck.

superstitions may sound similar to old wives' tales, superstitions involve luck or fate and some level of belief in magic. One common superstition tells us that if you walk under a ladder, something bad will soon happen. A person who believes in superstition will likely blame the next bad thing that happens to him on the ladder. Did one actually cause the other? Probably not. But according to the Stress Management Center and Phobia Institute in North Carolina, many people fall prey to the human mind's desire to associate thoughts and symbols with events. Like other types of folklore, people tend to believe it simply because they've heard it before.

So, the next time a black cat crosses your path, don't panic. Bad stuff happens anyway.



*For the superstitious, a black cat crossing your path may be an omen of misfortune and death.*

## Finding Text Evidence

Find each piece of text in the text evidence bank and highlight OR underline it with the color specified. Remember, you are looking for the piece or pieces of evidence that **most strongly** support the statement.

*For items 1-4, you'll be citing textual evidence to support what the text says explicitly.*

1. Find the sentence that gives the **best** definition for old wives' tales. Highlight it in **blue**.
2. Find the sentence that reveals one way superstitions are distinctly different from old wives' tales and urban legends. Highlight it in **green**.
3. Find the sentence that explains why websites that seek to discredit urban legends do not usually work. Highlight it in **purple**.

*For items 5-8, you'll be citing one piece or multiple pieces of textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text.*

4. Find a piece of text evidence that **best** explains why you might have heard the urban legend about the spider-infested beehive hairdo . Highlight it in **orange**.
5. Find two pieces of text evidence that explain why someone who walks under a ladder might truly believe that it brought him bad luck. Highlight them in **yellow**.
6. Which text evidence from the previous question (highlighted in **yellow**) **most strongly** explains **why** someone might believe the superstition? **Draw a circle** around the strongest text evidence.
7. Find two pieces of text evidence that prove that an old wives' tale is true. Highlight them in **pink**.
8. Find a piece of text evidence that strongly supports the idea that the Internet only made the problem of spreading false urban legends worse. Highlight it in **red**.

**Text Evidence Bank**

*For each item, find the appropriate piece(s) of text evidence and highlight or underline in the requested color.*

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<p>But according the Stress Management Center and Phobia Institute in North Carolina, many people fall prey to the human mind's desire to associate thoughts and symbols with events.</p>	<p>But instead of slowing these modern myths down, the Internet has actually helped to spread new urban legends even faster through email forwards and viral social media posts (think – Slender Man).</p>
<p>Bodily insect infestations are actually quite a common theme in urban legends.</p>	<p>A person who believes in superstition will likely blame the next bad thing that happens to him on the ladder</p>
<p>“chicken soup acts as an anti-inflammatory agent for your nasal cells, giving your nose the relief it needs.”</p>	<p>An old wives' tale is often a one-line piece of advice</p>
<p>Though a number of websites exist for the purpose of collecting and, when necessary, discrediting these urban legends, not everyone uses them.</p>	