

SAMOAN ETHNICITY AND BACKGROUND

Many Samoans come to Australia from New Zealand and may be familiar with the New Zealand health care system. Unlike Australia, there are many Pacific Islander-specific health services available in New Zealand.

Communication

Women from a Samoan background may be reluctant to discuss health issues openly with a health practitioner. Pacific Islanders in general may be reluctant to discuss personal issues with strangers. This should be kept in mind in health interactions.

Health related beliefs and practices

- Some Samoans believe that illness is caused by spirits, or retribution for not adequately helping their family in Samoa
- If western medicine is perceived as ineffective, then Samoans may use traditional healers.
- Queensland's climate allows the growth of many plants used for traditional medicine in Samoa. Some of these plants are readily available.
- Prayer is an important element of the healing process for many Samoans.
- Traditionally, Samoans have believed that the more they eat, the higher their status. This has had major health implications. However, dietary patterns are changing as awareness of healthy eating habits increases.

Pregnancy

Some Samoans believe that if a pregnant woman wears earrings, her infant's ears may be disfigured or misshapen. Similarly, wearing floral arrangements around the neck may cause the foetus to become entangled with the umbilical cord.

- Samoans often have many children and view pregnancy as a sickness.
- Pregnant women are cautioned against being alone in the house or going outside, especially after dark. Samoans believe that a lone pregnant woman can be hexed by evil spirits, causing abnormalities to the unborn child. A pregnant woman should always be accompanied by an elderly woman, even to the toilet.
- Samoans believe that pregnant women should avoid heavy work which may lead to the displacement of internal organs.

Birth

- For their first delivery, Samoan women usually return to their mother's home and after a confinement period, the new family returns home. This should be kept in mind since in Australia, Samoan women may have no parental support.
- Episiotomy is not considered a part of usual delivery-related procedures.
- Birth attendants usually perform a cut on the umbilical cord after it has stopped beating. After birth, the baby is massaged with blood from the placental part of the umbilical cord. Health professionals should be aware of this practice.

Population in Australia:
15,240 people

The second largest community is in Queensland

Population in Queensland: 4,867 people

Population in Brisbane: 4,343 people

Gender ratio: 92.3 males per 100 females

Median age: 41.6 years

Age	%
0-14	5.4
15-24	10.2
25-44	44.7
45-64	34.3
≥ 65	5.5

Australian-government sponsored education programs in the 1970s led to an increase in the number of Samoan immigrants.

Samoan is the main language spoken at home by Samoa immigrants in Australia.

Most people are Catholic, Latter Day Saints or followers of the Uniting Church.

After birth

- In Samoa, the placenta is usually expelled by pulling, while the abdomen is massaged. Sometimes the father is asked to apply force to facilitate expulsion.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the placenta is offered to the new parents. In Samoa the placenta is disposed of in various ways. It may be wrapped in a cloth and buried in the ground by close family members, burned in a hole dug in the ground, or thrown into the sea. It may be believed that the newborn is at risk if anything happens to the placenta.
- In Samoa, after labour, the woman's abdomen may be firmly bound with cloth to prevent the uterus from 'falling down'. This remains in place for up to one month.
- After delivery, women traditionally receive abdominal and pelvic floor massage to correct any displacement that may have occurred during labour. They will then bathe.
- Sometimes, a bowl of steaming water is placed between a woman's legs, so that the rising steam can cleanse the birth canal. In Australia, Samoan women could be asked if they would like a hot water bottle to replace this procedure.
- Once postnatal procedures are complete, a woman may be given a bowl of sago cooked in coconut cream and flavoured with lemon leaves.
- According to Samoan practice, a woman should rest for a month after her first delivery. After subsequent deliveries, she should rest until the infant's umbilical cord falls off. The benefits of early physical activity after birth should be discussed with Samoan women in Australia.

Infant care

- Samoan infants are usually bathed immediately after birth.
- A newborn is usually placed in cold water to make them breathe.
- Many attendants massage newborns with oil.
- Once bathed, infants are wrapped in a clean cloth or blanket and laid down to sleep. In Australia, Samoan women should be informed that they are not restricted from giving their infant gentle massage.

Infant feeding

- Samoan midwives may recommend that a woman breastfeed immediately after birth; others give boiled water only for up to five days.
- Samoan infants are fed on demand.
- Breastfeeding is often considered to be a contraceptive and the insufficiency of this as a sole method needs to be emphasized.
- Of the 193 Samoa-born women who delivered in Queensland Health facilities in 2006, at the time of discharge, 78% (150) exclusively breastfed, 8% (15) breastfed and formula fed and 14% (28) exclusively formula fed.

References

Kinloch, P.J.

1985. Midwives and midwifery in Western Samoa. In C.D.F. Parsons (Ed.), *Healing practices in the South Pacific* (pp. 199-212). Honolulu, Hawaii: [Laie, Hawaii]: Institute for Polynesian Studies; University of Hawaii Press

Macpherson, C., & Macpherson, L.

1990. *Samoan medical belief and practice*. Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press.

Schmitt, L.H., Freedman, L., & Pervan, R. (Eds.).

1995. *Genes, ethnicity and ageing* (Vol. 1). Nedlands, Australia: Centre for Human Biology, The University of Western Australia.

The University of Queensland.

1998. *Cultural diversity: a guide for health professionals*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland.