



# PARENTING FROM THE HEART



## Advice you can trust

Dr Liew (above) advises parents to be more attuned to the medical conditions of their children. PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG, NURIA LING

As medical professionals and parents, Dr Claudine Tan and Dr Liew Woei Kang provide guidance and encouragement to parents who are concerned about their children

### Seow Kai Lun

PARENTING is a journey that is filled with joy, from pregnancy to the child's growing years. However, there are moments when worry sets in, especially for first-time parents, when their child's health is at stake.

Fortunately, they can turn to doctors such as Dr Claudine Tan and Dr Liew Woei Kang, who frequently address the questions that first-time parents have and are able to offer advice on caring for their children.

Dr Tan, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Thomson Women's Clinic, meets parents-to-be and tells them what to expect during the nine months of pregnancy.

She says: "I give them advice on the dos and don'ts during pregnancy and try to alleviate any fears that they might have about the pregnancy itself and after."

During the early stages of pregnancy, many parents are worried about bleeding, which Dr Tan says is common. In most cases, the pregnancy progresses smoothly. Those who experience morning sickness in the first trimester and are unable to eat properly, resulting in weight loss, worry that this would affect the growth and development of their baby. "I assure them that this is temporary and most will improve once they enter into the second trimester of pregnancy," says Dr Tan.

After the baby is born, new mothers may find it tough to breastfeed and are usually worried about producing enough milk for their baby. "Many women assume that breastfeeding is a natural thing and that it would be relatively easy to accomplish. However, for most, it may take a few weeks of practice before both mother and child are comfortable with it," she says.

She recalls a new mum who came to her with problems on her milk supply. "I gave her some breastfeeding tips and advised her on her diet, and ironically, she came back a few weeks later with engorgement which was easily resolved," she says.

Dr Tan says she had difficulties when she started breastfeeding and managed to continue with the help of lactation consultants in the hospital and encouragement from her husband.

It can also be difficult for new parents to discern initially what the baby wants when he cries and parents have to be "sleuths" to find the cause. Dr Tan says she too needed time to figure out the reasons when her baby cried. With time, however, things fell into a natural rhythm.

"It is important for parents to play and interact with their child. This helps them understand their child's behaviour," she says, adding that parents should bear in mind that every child is different and they may face varied challenges.

### Dealing with allergies

Many parents go to Dr Liew, a pediatrician at SBCC Baby & Child Clinic, for advice on their children's food allergies. "More people think they or their children have food allergies than is true. An accurate diagnosis is important to rationalise strict elimination, as malnutrition can occur," he says.

If there really is a food allergy, Dr Liew goes through an action plan with the parents in case there is an accidental ingestion of the food as well as the medication required.

Another common ailment he investigates is atopic dermatitis or eczema, especially for infants who are less than one year old. Moisturising is the key to preventing this, he says, adding that he usually asks patients what has worked in the past, before tailoring a new skin-care plan.

He also makes it a point to educate parents about the use of medications for illnesses. This includes the key difference between symptomatic medications and those with specific uses such as antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medications.

"Many parents also have excessive worries regarding childhood fevers. It is still a general myth that fever damages the brain. Fever is a symptom of an underlying infection, and is in fact part of



Many women assume that breastfeeding is a natural thing and that it would be relatively easy to accomplish. However, for most, it may take a few weeks of practice before both mother and child are comfortable with it.

— Dr Claudine Tan (above), consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, Thomson Women's Clinic

the body's defence mechanism. The aim of using fever medications is to make the child more comfortable," he says.

For Ms Angel Teo, Dr Liew was a great help when her 13-month-old daughter Charlotte was in the hospital for two weeks after birth and required monthly visits to the doctor. "He was very patient and answered all the questions that I had. Though I was not able to contact him every time, I could send him e-mails that he would answer," says the 29-year-old homemaker.

Recently, Charlotte showed signs of not want-

ing to eat and is small for her age. Dr Liew advised Ms Teo to monitor the situation and not worry excessively as Charlotte looked healthy and was active.

Dr Liew, a father of five, advises that parents should be personally involved in the care and development of their children to be more attuned to their medical conditions and do the best for them.

Dr Tan adds that parents should trust that they know their own child best and take any advice given to them in the context of what they know about their child.