

Plains Indians Umbilical Cord Amulet

Plains Indian mothers took special care of their newborn baby's umbilical cord. When the cord fell off, the mother sewed it into a small buckskin bag. This bag was attached to the baby's cradle as its first toy, later, it was worn around the child's neck or tied to his clothing. The child wore it throughout a lifetime – a charm to ensure long life. Many people were buried with it in old age. This talisman was thought to bring connectedness to the tribe, to the individual family unit, and to serve as protection.

The pouches (also referred to as amulets) were decorated with beads and shaped like a turtle for girls and a lizard for boys. Other designs were occasionally chosen, especially in modern day. But, the turtle and lizard were most common as they were considered the guardians of life because of their abilities to protect themselves. The turtle's hard shell provides complete protection when the animal withdraws into it. Some lizards shed their tails to distract predators; others change color to camouflage themselves. Thus, they are good candidates for long, safe lives.

