

Is Friday the 13th an unlucky day?

Posted by [Jacqui Atkielski](#) On 05/13/2016

HOLLYWOOD, MD-- Some will call today the unluckiest day of the year.

If you're a believer, try to not step on sidewalk cracks, walk under ladders, break mirrors or encounter any black cats.

Fear of Friday the 13th, or paraskevidekatriaphobia, has spawned a horror movies franchise and a tradition of widespread paranoia when it comes up on the calendar. If a month starts on a Sunday, you'll have a Friday the 13th in that month.

Folklore historians say it's difficult to determine how the taboo came to be. Many believe that it originates from the Last Supper, and the 13 guests that sat at the table on the day before the Friday on which Jesus was crucified, according to [Time](#).

What began as a Christian interpretation leads some modern Americans to avoid staying at hotel rooms with the number 13, venturing above the 13th floor of a building, and won't sit in the 13th row of an airplane. beware of venturing up to the 13th floor of any building or try not to sit in the 13th row in airplanes.

There is historic proof that people may have feared Friday the 13th, according to another [Time article](#).

On a Friday the 13th in 1307, thousands of Knights Templar were arrested on orders from King Philip IV of France because of suspicions that their secret initiation rituals made them enemies of the faith. After years of torture, they were burned at the stake. Dan Brown's novel The DaVinci Code popularized the link between the Knights Templar and Friday the 13th.

Friday was considered an unlucky day as early as the 14th century. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote in The Canterbury Tales that "on a Friday fell all this mischance."

Not all cultures believe Friday the 13th is unlucky. In Greek and Hispanic cultures, Tuesday the 13th is considered far more ominous. In Italy, Friday the 17th is spookier than the 13th.

"If anything bad happens to you on Friday the 13th, the two will be forever associated in your mind," said Thomas Gilovich, a psychologist at Cornell University. "All those uneventful days in which the 13th fell on a Friday will be ignored."

As listed in [this article](#), here are some other superstitions that have survived, along with the fear of Friday the 13th:

Beginner's luck - Usually heard when an 'expert' losing a game or bet to a novice, beginner's luck is the idea that newbies are unusually likely to win when they try out a sport, game or activity for the first time. Those novices might come out ahead in some cases because the novice is less stressed out about winning. Too much anxiety can hamper performance, or it could just be a fluke, especially in chance-based gambling games. Or, like many superstitions, a belief in beginner's luck might arise because of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the psychological phenomenon in which people are more likely to remember events that fit their worldview. If you believe you're going to win because you're a beginner, you're more likely to remember all the times you were right, and forget the times you ended up in last place.

Find a penny, pick it up - And all day long, you'll have good luck. This rhyme may come up because finding money is lucky. But it might also be a spin-off of another old rhyme, "See a pin, pick it up/ and all day long you'll have good luck/ See a pin, let it lay/ and your luck will pass away."

Don't walk under a ladder - Frankly, this superstition is pretty practical. Who wants to be responsible for stumbling and knocking a carpenter off his perch? But one theory holds that this superstition arises from a Christian belief in the Holy Trinity: Since a ladder leaning against a wall forms a triangle, breaking that triangle was blasphemous. Then again, another popular theory is that a fear of walking under a ladder has to do with its resemblance to a medieval gallows. We're sticking with the safety-first explanation for this one.

Crossing paths with a black cat - As companion animals for humans for thousands of years, cats play all sorts of mythological roles. In ancient Egypt, cats were revered. Today, Americans collectively keep more than 81 million cats as pets. So why keep a black cat out of your path? This superstition arises from old beliefs in witches and their animal familiars, which were often said to take the form of cats.

A rabbit's foot will bring you luck - Talismans and amulets are one way of fending off evil, like crosses and garlic that supposedly keep vampires at bay. Rabbit feet as talismans may hark back to early Celtic tribes in Britain. They may also arise from hoodoo, a form of African-American folk magic and superstition that blends Native American, European and African tradition.

Bad luck comes in threes - Remember confirmation bias? The belief that bad luck comes in threes is a classic example. A couple things go wrong, and believers may start to look for the next bit of bad luck. A lost shoe might be forgotten one day, but seen as the third in a series of bad breaks the next. Some also believe that death comes in threes, such as famous celebrities and public figures.

Don't break that mirror - It's been told that breaking a mirror gives you seven years of bad luck. This belief may have come from the belief that mirrors don't just reflect your image, they hold bits of your soul. That belief led people in the old days of the American South to cover mirrors in a house when someone died, or their soul will be trapped inside. Like the number three, the number seven is often associated with luck. Seven years is a long time to be unlucky, which may be why people have come up with counter-measures to free themselves after breaking a mirror. These include touching a piece of the broken mirror to a tombstone or grinding the mirror shards into powder.

Knock on wood - This phrase is almost like a verbal talisman, designed to ward off bad luck after tempting fate. The fixation on wood may come from old myths about good spirits in trees or from an association with the Christian cross. Similar phrases abound in multiple languages, suggesting that the desire not to upset a spiteful universe is very common.

Make a wish on a wishbone - The tradition of that turkey bone tug-of-war goes back to first-century Romans. They used to fight over dried wishbones, which they believed were good luck, and would accidentally break them, ushering in the idea that whoever has the largest bit of bone gets their wish. Bird bones have

also been used in divination, with a supposed soothsayer throwing the bones and reading their patterns to predict the future.

Cross your fingers - A gesture that's said to date back to early Christianity, those wishing for luck will often cross one finger over another. The story goes that two people used to cross index fingers when making a wish, a symbol of support from a friend to the person making the wish. Anything associated with the shape of the Christian cross was thought to be good luck. The tradition gradually became something people could do on their own; these days, just saying "fingers crossed" is enough to get the message, well, across.

No umbrellas inside - Opening an umbrella indoors is supposed to bring bad luck, though the origins of this belief are murky. Legends abound from a story of an ancient Roman woman who happened to have opened her umbrella moments before her house collapsed. Another legend claims a British prince who accepted two umbrellas from a visiting king and died within months. Like the "don't walk under a ladder" superstition, this seems to be a case of a myth arising to keep people from doing something that is slightly dangerous in the first place.

No matter what you believe about Friday the 13th or superstitions, you should avoid making fun of people who will take today seriously. There is potential to offend their deeply held cultural beliefs, and making fun of people only earns you bad karma.

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