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What do women know and understand about nutrition for pregnancy? A qualitative analysis

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Optimal nutrition supply to the developing foetus is paramount in achieving appropriate foetal growth and development. The Australian dietary guidelines advise about the amounts and types of foods for pregnancy⁽¹⁾. However, previous studies in reproductive aged women⁽²⁾ and in pregnant women⁽³⁾ showed suboptimal adherence to dietary recommendations. There is no evidence on the experience of sourcing nor uptake of the dietary guidelines among pregnant women. The aim of this study is to qualitatively explore women's knowledge and understanding of nutrition information for pregnancy, including the current Australian dietary guidelines for pregnancy. Twelve pregnant women were recruited from a longitudinal study from the first through third trimester of pregnancy. Purposive sampling was adopted with an intention to recruit for diverse health information seeking habits. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women at different trimesters, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically. Three themes were generated regarding information sourcing, uptake and evaluation. (i) Women had limited knowledge about the pregnancy dietary guidelines, leaving them to source pregnancy related nutrition information elsewhere. (ii) Women described other healthy eating advice that contributed to confusion and potential incompatibility with their dietary beliefs and lifestyle practices. (iii) Women shared that they were capable of seeking and evaluating the identified dietary advice, but the inconsistency across information sources contributed to over-cautious behaviour and dietary restrictions. Our findings suggest there is a general lack of awareness of the official dietary guidelines for pregnancy. To optimise pregnancy nutritional intake, efforts should be made to increase utilisation of the Australian dietary guidelines for pregnancy and to support uptake of dietary advice among pregnant women.

References

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