Original research

General nutrition-related knowledge and beliefs of post-partum women

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Abstract (Nutr Diet 2004;61:82–87)

Objective: To examine the general food and nutrition-related beliefs and knowledge of post-partum women in Brisbane and Canberra.

Design: A cross-sectional study with data collected by trained interviewers using a structured questionnaire.

Subjects: One hundred and sixty-eight post-partum women, who gave birth to a live infant in Brisbane or Canberra.

Setting: Subjects were drawn from three maternity hospitals in Canberra and one in Brisbane and were interviewed during a seven-day sampling period at each hospital.

Main outcome measures: Outcome measures were: beliefs, opinions and intentions relating to food, nutrition and weight; knowledge of requirements of core foods; and sources of nutrition information.

Statistical analysis: Standard statistical tests were used to assess bivariate relationships and multivariate analyses were performed using multiple logistic regression.

Results: Almost all the women (97%) were confident they could feed their families a healthy diet but their knowledge of core food requirements was inadequate with only 1.9% correctly answering four food intake questions, 10.5% correctly answering three food intake questions, 67.3% correctly answering two food intake questions and 20.4% correctly answering one food intake question. The major sources of nutrition information cited by these women were: reading (44.0%), education (36.9%), family (22.0%, particularly mothers), the media (13.1%), weight loss diets and organisations (4.8%) and health professionals (4.2%).

Conclusion: There is a need to provide pregnant and post-partum women with information about core foods requirements for health, so that they can better guide their families to healthful eating habits. Further research should explore ways in which this can be achieved.

Key words: post-partum women, food, nutrition, beliefs, knowledge

Introduction

Australia is currently experiencing increasing levels of overweight and obesity (1) leading to concerns about related lifestyle diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, some cancers and non-insulin dependent diabetes (2,3). Many of these diseases have associated components of overnutrition and underactivity (4). Concurrently, there appear to be a number of diseases associated with undernutrition such as underweight, constipation, osteoporosis and anaemia (5). To address these issues, health authorities have developed food (5–9), nutrient (10) and physical activity (11) guidelines to promote health among Australians. However, the nutrition and physical activity targets are not being achieved (12–14).

Obesity and the risk of related diseases are not only issues among adults, but are also increasingly of concern among Australian children and adolescents, with 13% to 26% of boys and 19% to 23% of girls aged two to 18 years who are overweight or obese (15). This appears to be associated with an increase in energy intake, a decrease in formal and incidental physical activity and an increase in sedentary leisure occupations such as watching television or videos or playing computer games (16). In addition, many children and adolescents are also not consuming the recommended intakes of core foods (cereals, fruit, vegetables, protein foods and dairy foods) (7,13).

In Australia, mothers remain the primary care givers for their children, and have a major role in deciding the food intake of most families with children (17). Women also seem to be motivated to change during pregnancy and...